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**STORIES BY ENGLISH AUTHORS**



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J. M. BARRIE

# STORIES BY ENGLISH AUTHORS

## LONDON

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THE INCONSIDERATE WAITER By J. M. BARRIE  
THE BLACK POODLE . . . . By F. ANSTY  
THAT BRUTE SIMMONS . . . By ARTHUR MORRISON  
A ROSE OF THE GHETTO . . By I. ZANGWILL  
AN IDYL OF LONDON . . . By BEATRICE HARRADEN  
THE OMNIBUS . . . . . By "Q"  
THE HIRED BABY . . . . . By MARIE CORRELLI

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1896

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# THE INCONSIDERATE WAITER

BY

J. M. BARRIE





## THE INCONSIDERATE WAITER

BY J. M. BARRIE

FREQUENTLY I have to ask myself in the street for the name of the man I bowed to just now, and then, before I can answer, the wind of the first corner blows him from my memory. I have a theory, however, that those puzzling faces, which pass before I can see who cut the coat, all belong to club waiters.

Until William forced his affairs upon me that was all I did know of the private life of waiters, though I have been in the club for twenty years. I was even unaware whether they slept downstairs or had their own homes; nor had I the interest to inquire of other members, nor they the knowledge to inform me. I hold that this sort of people should be fed and clothed and given airing and wives and children, and I subscribe yearly, I believe, for these purposes; but to come into closer relation with waiters is bad form; they are club fittings, and William should have kept his distress to himself, or taken it away and patched it up like a rent in one of the chairs. His inconsiderateness has been a pair of spectacles to me for months.

It is not correct taste to know the name of a

club waiter, so that I must apologise for knowing William's, and still more for not forgetting it. If, again, to speak of a waiter is bad form, to speak bitterly is the comic degree of it. But William has disappointed me sorely. There were years when I would defer dining several minutes that he might wait on me. His pains to reserve the window-seat for me were perfectly satisfactory. I allowed him privileges, as to suggest dishes, and would give him information, as that some one had startled me in the reading-room by slamming a door. I have shown him how I cut my finger with a piece of string. Obviously he was gratified by these attentions, usually recommending a liqueur; and I fancy he must have understood my sufferings, for he often looked ill himself. Probably he was rheumatic, but I cannot say for certain, as I never thought of asking, and he had the sense to see that the knowledge would be offensive to me.

In the smoking-room we have a waiter so independent that once, when he brought me a yellow chartreuse, and I said I had ordered green, he replied, "No, sir; you said yellow." William could never have been guilty of such effrontery. In appearance, of course, he is mean, but I can no more describe him than a milkmaid could draw cows. I suppose we distinguish one waiter from another much as we pick our hat from the rack. We could have plotted a murder safely before William. He never presumed to have opinions of his own. When such was my mood he remained silent, and

if I announced that something diverting had happened to me he laughed before I told him what it was. He turned the twinkle in his eye off or on at my bidding as readily as if it was the gas. To my "Sure to be wet to-morrow," he would reply, "Yes, sir;" and to Trelawney's "It does n't look like rain," two minutes afterward, he would reply, "No, sir." It was one member who said Lightning Rod would win the Derby and another who said Lightning Rod had no chance, but it was William who agreed with both. He was like a cheroot, which may be smoked from either end. So used was I to him that, had he died or got another situation (or whatever it is such persons do when they disappear from the club), I should probably have told the head waiter to bring him back, as I disliked changes.

It would not become me to know precisely when I began to think William an ingrate, but I date his lapse from the evening when he brought me oysters. I detest oysters, and no one knew it better than William. He has agreed with me that he could not understand any gentleman's liking them. Between me and a certain member who smacks his lips twelve times to a dozen of them William knew I liked a screen to be placed until we had reached the soup, and yet he gave me the oysters and the other man my sardine. Both the other member and I called quickly for brandy and the head waiter. To do William justice, he shook, but never can I forget his audacious explanation:

"Beg pardon, sir, but I was thinking of something else."

In these words William had flung off the mask, and now I knew him for what he was.

I must not be accused of bad form for looking at William on the following evening. What prompted me to do so was not personal interest in him, but a desire to see whether I dare let him wait on me again. So, recalling that a caster was off a chair yesterday, one is entitled to make sure that it is on to-day before sitting down. If the expression is not too strong, I may say that I was taken aback by William's manner. Even when crossing the room to take my orders he let his one hand play nervously with the other. I had to repeat "Sardine on toast" twice, and instead of answering "Yes, sir," as if my selection of sardine on toast was a personal gratification to him, which is the manner one expects of a waiter, he glanced at the clock, then out at the window, and, starting, asked, "Did you say sardine on toast, sir?"

It was the height of summer, when London smells like a chemist's shop, and he who has the dinner-table at the window needs no candles to show him his knife and fork. I lay back at intervals, now watching a starved-looking woman asleep on a door-step, and again complaining of the club bananas. By-and-by I saw a little girl of the commonest kind, ill-clad and dirty, as all these Arabs are. Their parents should be compelled to feed and clothe them comfortably, or at least to keep

them indoors, where they cannot offend our eyes. Such children are for pushing aside with one's umbrella; but this girl I noticed because she was gazing at the club windows. She had stood thus for perhaps ten minutes when I became aware that some one was leaning over me to look out at the window. I turned round. Conceive my indignation on seeing that the rude person was William.

"How dare you, William?" I said, sternly. He seemed not to hear me. Let me tell, in the measured words of one describing a past incident, what then took place. To get nearer the window he pressed heavily on my shoulder.

"William, you forget yourself!" I said, meaning—as I see now—that he had forgotten me.

I heard him gulp, but not to my reprimand. He was scanning the street. His hands chattered on my shoulder, and, pushing him from me, I saw that his mouth was agape.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

He stared at me, and then, like one who had at last heard the echo of my question, seemed to be brought back to the club. He turned his face from me for an instant, and answered shakily:

"I beg your pardon, sir! I—I should n't have done it. Are the bananas too ripe, sir?"

He recommended the nuts, and awaited my verdict so anxiously while I ate one that I was about to speak graciously, when I again saw his eyes drag him to the window.

"William," I said, my patience giving way at



last, "I dislike being waited on by a melancholy waiter."

"Yes, sir," he replied, trying to smile, and then broke out passionately, "For God's sake, sir, tell me, have you seen a little girl looking in at the club windows?"

He had been a good waiter once, and his distracted visage was spoiling my dinner.

"There," I said, pointing to the girl, and no doubt would have added that he must bring me coffee immediately, had he continued to listen. But already he was beckoning to the child. I had not the least interest in her (indeed, it had never struck me that waiters had private affairs, and I still think it a pity that they should have); but as I happened to be looking out at the window I could not avoid seeing what occurred. As soon as the girl saw William she ran into the middle of the street, regardless of vehicles, and nodded three times to him. Then she disappeared.

I have said that she was quite a common child, without attraction of any sort, and yet it was amazing the difference she made in William. He gasped relief, like one who has broken through the anxiety that checks breathing, and into his face there came a silly laugh of happiness. I had dined well, on the whole, so I said:

"I am glad to see you cheerful again, William."

I meant that I approved his cheerfulness because it helped my digestion, but he must needs think I was sympathising with him.

"Thank you, sir," he answered. "Oh, sir! when she nodded and I saw it was all right I could have gone down on my knees to God."

I was as much horrified as if he had dropped a plate on my toes. Even William, disgracefully emotional as he was at the moment, flung out his arms to recall the shameful words.

"Coffee, William!" I said, sharply.

I sipped my coffee indignantly, for it was plain to me that William had something on his mind.

"You are not vexed with me, sir?" he had the hardihood to whisper.

"It was a liberty," I said.

"I know, sir; but I was beside myself."

"That was a liberty also."

He hesitated, and then blurted out:

"It is my wife, sir. She—"

I stopped him with my hand. William, whom I had favoured in so many ways, was a married man! I might have guessed as much years before had I ever reflected about waiters, for I knew vaguely that his class did this sort of thing. His confession was distasteful to me, and I said warningly:

"Remember where you are, William."

"Yes, sir; but you see, she is so delicate—"

"Delicate! I forbid your speaking to me on unpleasant topics."

"Yes, sir; begging your pardon."

It was characteristic of William to beg my pardon and withdraw his wife, like some unsuccessful



dish, as if its taste would not remain in the mouth. I shall be chided for questioning him further about his wife, but, though doubtless an unusual step, it was only bad form superficially, for my motive was irreproachable. I inquired for his wife, not because I was interested in her welfare, but in the hope of allaying my irritation. So I am entitled to invite the wayfarer who has bespattered me with mud to scrape it off.

I desired to be told by William that the girl's signals meant his wife's recovery to health. He should have seen that such was my wish and answered accordingly. But, with the brutal inconsiderateness of his class, he said :

"She has had a good day; but the doctor, he—the doctor is afeard she is dying."

Already I repented my question. William and his wife seemed in league against me, when they might so easily have chosen some other member.

"Pooh! the doctor," I said.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"Have you been married long, William?"

"Eight years, sir. Eight years ago she was—I—I mind her when . . . and now the doctor says—"

The fellow gaped at me. "More coffee, sir?" he asked.

"What is her ailment?"

"She was always one of the delicate kind, but full of spirit, and—and you see, she has had a baby lately—"

"William!"

"And she—I—the doctor is afeard she's not picking up."

"I feel sure she will pick up."

"Yes, sir?"

It must have been the wine I had drunk that made me tell him:

"I was once married, William. My wife—it was just such a case as yours."

"She did not get better, sir?"

"No."

After a pause he said, "Thank you, sir," meaning for the sympathy that made me tell him that. But it must have been the wine.

"That little girl comes here with a message from your wife?"

"Yes; if she nods three times it means my wife is a little better."

"She nodded thrice to-day."

"But she is told to do that to relieve me, and maybe those nods don't tell the truth."

"Is she your girl?"

"No; we have none but the baby. She is a neighbour's; she comes twice a day."

"It is heartless of her parents not to send her every hour."

"But she is six years old," he said, "and has a house and two sisters to look after in the daytime, and a dinner to cook. Gentlefolk don't understand."

"I suppose you live in some low part, William."

"Off Drury Lane," he answered, flushing; "but—but it is n't low. You see, we were never used to anything better, and I mind when I let her see the house before we were married, she—she a sort of cried because she was so proud of it. That was eight years ago, and now—she's afeard she'll die when I'm away at my work."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Never; she always says she is feeling a little stronger."

"Then how can you know she is afraid of that?"

"I don't know how I know, sir; but when I am leaving the house in the morning I look at her from the door, and she looks at me, and then I—I know."

"A green chartreuse, William!"

I tried to forget William's vulgar story in billiards, but he had spoiled my game. My opponent, to whom I can give twenty, ran out when I was sixty-seven, and I put aside my cue pettishly. That in itself was bad form, but what would they have thought had they known that a waiter's impertinence caused it! I grew angrier with William as the night wore on, and next day I punished him by giving my orders through another waiter.

As I had my window-seat, I could not but see that the girl was late again. Somehow I dawdled over my coffee. I had an evening paper before me, but there was so little in it that my eyes found

more of interest in the street. It did not matter to me whether William's wife died, but when that girl had promised to come, why did she not come? These lower classes only give their word to break it. The coffee was undrinkable.

At last I saw her. William was at another window, pretending to do something with the curtains. I stood up, pressing closer to the window. The coffee had been so bad that I felt shaky. She nodded three times and smiled.

"She is a little better," William whispered to me, almost gaily.

"Whom are you speaking of?" I asked, coldly, and immediately retired to the billiard-room, where I played a capital game. The coffee was much better there than in the dining-room.

Several days passed, and I took care to show William that I had forgotten his maunderings. I chanced to see the little girl (though I never looked for her) every evening, and she always nodded three times, save once, when she shook her head, and then William's face grew white as a napkin. I remember this incident because that night I could not get into a pocket. So badly did I play that the thought of it kept me awake in bed, and that, again, made me wonder how William's wife was. Next day I went to the club early (which was not my custom) to see the new books. Being in the club at any rate, I looked into the dining-room to ask William if I had left my gloves there, and the sight of him reminded me of his wife; so I asked

for her. He shook his head mournfully, and I went off in a rage.

So accustomed am I to the club that when I dine elsewhere I feel uncomfortable next morning, as if I had missed a dinner. William knew this; yet here he was, hounding me out of the club! That evening I dined (as the saying is) at a restaurant, where no sauce was served with the asparagus. Furthermore, as if that were not triumph enough for William, his doleful face came between me and every dish, and I seemed to see his wife dying to annoy me.

I dined next day at the club for self-preservation, taking, however, a table in the middle of the room, and engaging a waiter who had once nearly poisoned me by not interfering when I put two lumps of sugar into my coffee instead of one, which is my allowance. But no William came to me to acknowledge his humiliation, and by-and-by I became aware that he was not in the room. Suddenly the thought struck me that his wife must be dead, and I— It was the worst cooked and the worst served dinner I ever had in the club.

I tried the smoking-room. Usually the talk there is entertaining, but on that occasion it was so frivolous that I did not remain five minutes. In the card-room a member told me excitedly that a policeman had spoken rudely to him; and my strange comment was:

“After all, it is a small matter.”

In the library, where I had not been for years,

I found two members asleep, and, to my surprise, William on a ladder dusting books.

"You have not heard, sir?" he said, in answer to my raised eyebrows. Descending the ladder, he whispered tragically: "It was last evening, sir. I—I lost my head, and I—swore at a member."

I stepped back from William, and glanced apprehensively at the two members. They still slept.

"I hardly knew," William went on, "what I was doing all day yesterday, for I had left my wife so weakly that—"

I stamped my foot.

"I beg your pardon for speaking of her," he had the grace to say, "but I could n't help slipping to the window often yesterday to look for Jenny, and when she did come, and I saw she was crying, it—it a sort of confused me, and I did n't know right, sir, what I was doing. I hit against a member, Mr. Myddleton Finch, and he—he jumped and swore at me. Well, sir, I had just touched him after all, and I was so miserable, it a kind of stung me to be treated like—like that, and me a man as well as him; and I lost my senses, and—and I swore back."

William's shamed head sank on his chest, but I even let pass his insolence in likening himself to a member of the club, so afraid was I of the sleepers waking and detecting me in talk with a waiter.

"For the love of God," William cried, with coarse emotion, "don't let them dismiss me!"

"Speak lower!" I said. "Who sent you here?"

"I was turned out of the dining-room at once, and told to attend to the library until they had decided what to do with me. Oh, sir, I 'll lose my place!"

He was blubbering, as if a change of waiters was a matter of importance.

"This is very bad, William," I said. "I fear I can do nothing for you."

"Have mercy on a distracted man!" he entreated. "I 'll go on my knees to Mr. Myddleton Finch."

How could I but despise a fellow who would be thus abject for a pound a week?

"I dare not tell her," he continued, "that I have lost my place. She would just fall back and die."

"I forbade your speaking of your wife," I said, sharply, "unless you can speak pleasantly of her."

"But she may be worse now, sir, and I cannot even see Jenny from here. The library windows look to the back."

"If she dies," I said, "it will be a warning to you to marry a stronger woman next time."

Now every one knows that there is little real affection among the lower orders. As soon as they have lost one mate they take another. Yet William, forgetting our relative positions, drew himself up and raised his fist, and if I had not stepped back I swear he would have struck me.

The highly improper words William used I will omit, out of consideration for him. Even while he

was apologising for them I retired to the smoking-room, where I found the cigarettes so badly rolled that they would not keep alight. After a little I remembered that I wanted to see Myddleton Finch about an improved saddle of which a friend of his has the patent. He was in the newsroom, and, having questioned him about the saddle, I said :

"By the way, what is this story about your swearing at one of the waiters?"

"You mean about his swearing at me," Myddleton Finch replied, reddening.

"I am glad that was it," I said; "for I could not believe you guilty of such bad form."

"If I did swear—" he was beginning, but I went on :

"The version which reached me was that you swore at him, and he repeated the word. I heard he was to be dismissed and you reprimanded."

"Who told you that?" asked Myddleton Finch, who is a timid man.

"I forget; it is club talk," I replied, lightly. "But of course the committee will take your word. The waiter, whichever one he is, richly deserves his dismissal for insulting you without provocation."

Then our talk returned to the saddle, but Myddleton Finch was abstracted, and presently he said :

"Do you know, I fancy I was wrong in thinking that waiter swore at me, and I 'll withdraw my charge to-morrow."

Myddleton Finch then left me, and, sitting alone, I realised that I had been doing William a service.



To some slight extent I may have intentionally helped him to retain his place in the club, and I now see the reason, which was that he alone knows precisely to what extent I like my claret heated.

For a mere second I remembered William's remark that he should not be able to see the girl Jenny from the library windows. Then this recollection drove from my head that I had only dined in the sense that my dinner-bill was paid. Returning to the dining-room, I happened to take my chair at the window, and while I was eating a deviled kidney I saw in the street the girl whose nods had such an absurd effect on William.

The children of the poor are as thoughtless as their parents, and this Jenny did not sign to the windows in the hope that William might see her, though she could not see him. Her face, which was disgracefully dirty, bore doubt and dismay on it, but whether she brought good news it would not tell. Somehow I had expected her to signal when she saw me, and, though her message could not interest me, I was in the mood in which one is irritated at that not taking place which he is awaiting. Ultimately she seemed to be making up her mind to go away.

A boy was passing with the evening papers, and I hurried out to get one, rather thoughtlessly, for we have all the papers in the club. Unfortunately, I misunderstood the direction the boy had taken; but round the first corner (out of sight of the club

windows) I saw the girl Jenny, and so I asked her how William's wife was.

"Did he send you to me?" she replied, impertinently taking me for a waiter. "My!" she added, after a second scrutiny, "I b'lieve you're one of them. His missis is a bit better, and I was to tell him as she took all the tapiocar."

"How could you tell him?" I asked.

"I was to do like this," she replied, and went through the supping of something out of a plate in dumb-show.

"That would not show she ate all the tapioca," I said.

"But I was to end like this," she answered, licking an imaginary plate with her tongue.

I gave her a shilling (to get rid of her), and returned to the club disgusted.

Later in the evening I had to go to the club library for a book, and while William was looking in vain for it (I had forgotten the title) I said to him:

"By the way, William, Mr. Myddleton Finch is to tell the committee that he was mistaken in the charge he brought against you, so you will doubtless be restored to the dining-room to-morrow."

The two members were still in their chairs, probably sleeping lightly; yet he had the effrontery to thank me.

"Don't thank me," I said, blushing at the imputation. "Remember your place, William!"

"But Mr. Myddleton Finch knew I swore," he insisted.

"A gentleman," I replied, stiffly, "cannot remember for twenty-four hours what a waiter has said to him."

"No, sir; but—"

To stop him I had to say: "And, ah, William, your wife is a little better. She has eaten the tapioca—all of it."

"How can you know, sir?"

"By an accident."

"Jenny signed to the window?"

"No."

"Then you saw her, and went out, and—"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, sir, to do that for me! May God bl—"

"William!"

"Forgive me, sir; but—when I tell my missis, she will say it was thought of your own wife as made you do it."

He wrung my hand. I dared not withdraw it, lest we should waken the sleepers.

William returned to the dining-room, and I had to show him that if he did not cease looking gratefully at me I must change my waiter. I also ordered him to stop telling me nightly how his wife was, but I continued to know, as I could not help seeing the girl Jenny from the window. Twice in a week I learned from this objectionable child that the ailing woman had again eaten all the tapioca.

Then I became suspicious of William. I will tell why.

It began with a remark of Captain Upjohn's. We had been speaking of the inconvenience of not being able to get a hot dish served after 1 A.M., and he said:

"It is because these lazy waiters would strike. If the beggars had a love of their work they would not rush away from the club the moment one o'clock strikes. That glum fellow who often waits on you takes to his heels the moment he is clear of the club steps. He ran into me the other night at the top of the street, and was off without apologising."

"You mean the foot of the street, Upjohn," I said; for such is the way to Drury Lane.

"No; I mean the top. The man was running west."

"East."

"West."

I smiled, which so annoyed him that he bet me two to one in sovereigns. The bet could have been decided most quickly by asking William a question, but I thought, foolishly doubtless, that it might hurt his feelings, so I watched him leave the club. The possibility of Upjohn's winning the bet had seemed remote to me. Conceive my surprise, therefore, when William went westward.

Amazed, I pursued him along two streets without realising that I was doing so. Then curiosity put me into a hansom. We followed William, and it proved to be a three-shilling fare, for, running

when he was in breath and walking when he was out of it, he took me to West Kensington.

I discharged my cab, and from across the street watched William's incomprehensible behaviour. He had stopped at a dingy row of workmen's houses, and knocked at the darkened window of one of them. Presently a light showed. So far as I could see, some one pulled up the blind and for ten minutes talked to William. I was uncertain whether they talked, for the window was not opened, and I felt that, had William spoken through the glass loud enough to be heard inside, I must have heard him too. Yet he nodded and beckoned. I was still bewildered when, by setting off the way he had come, he gave me the opportunity of going home.

Knowing from the talk of the club what the lower orders are, could I doubt that this was some discreditable love-affair of William's? His solicitude for his wife had been mere pretence; so far as it was genuine, it meant that he feared she might recover. He probably told her that he was detained nightly in the club till three.

I was miserable next day, and blamed the deviled kidneys for it. Whether William was unfaithful to his wife was nothing to me, but I had two plain reasons for insisting on his going straight home from his club: the one that, as he had made me lose a bet, I must punish him; the other that he could wait upon me better if he went to bed betimes.

Yet I did not question him. There was something in his face that— Well, I seemed to see his dying wife in it.

I was so out of sorts that I could eat no dinner. I left the club. Happening to stand for some time at the foot of the street, I chanced to see the girl Jenny coming, and— No; let me tell the truth, though the whole club reads: I was waiting for her.

“How is William’s wife to-day?” I asked.

“She told me to nod three times,” the little slattern replied; “but she looked like nothink but a dead one till she got the brandy.”

“Hush, child!” I said, shocked. “You don’t know how the dead look.”

“Bless yer,” she answered, “don’t I just! Why, I’ve helped to lay ’em out. I’m going on seven.”

“Is William good to his wife?”

“Course he is. Ain’t she his missis?”

“Why should that make him good to her?” I asked, cynically, out of my knowledge of the poor. But the girl, precocious in many ways, had never had my opportunities of studying the lower classes in the newspapers, fiction, and club talk. She shut one eye, and, looking up wonderingly, said:

“Ain’t you green—just!”

“When does William reach home at night?”

“T ain’t night; it’s morning. When I wakes up at half dark and half light, and hears a door shutting, I know as it’s either father going off to his work or Mr. Hicking coming home from his.”

“Who is Mr. Hicking?”

"Him as we 've been speaking on—William. We calls him mister, 'cause he 's a toff. Father 's just doing jobs in Covent Garden, but Mr. Hicking, he 's a waiter, and a clean shirt every day. The old woman would like father to be a waiter, but he hain't got the 'ristocratic look."

"What old woman?"

"Go 'long! that 's my mother. Is it true there 's a waiter in the club just for to open the door?"

"Yes; but—"

"And another just for to lick the stamps? My!"

"William leaves the club at one o'clock?" I said, interrogatively.

She nodded. "My mother," she said, "is one to talk, and she says to Mr. Hicking as he should get away at twelve, 'cause his missis needs him more 'n the gentlemen need him. The old woman do talk."

"And what does William answer to that?"

"He says as the gentlemen can't be kept waiting for their cheese."

"But William does not go straight home when he leaves the club?"

"That 's the kid."

"Kid!" I echoed, scarcely understanding, for, knowing how little the poor love their children, I had asked William no questions about the baby.

"Did n't you know his missis had a kid?"

"Yes; but that is no excuse for William's staying away from his sick wife," I answered, sharply. A baby in such a home as William's, I reflected,

must be trying; but still— Besides, his class can sleep through any din.

"The kid ain't in our court," the girl explained. "He 's in W., he is, and I 've never been out of W. C.; leastwise, not as I knows on."

"This is W. I suppose you mean that the child is at West Kensington? Well, no doubt it was better for William's wife to get rid of the child—"

"Better!" interposed the girl. "'T ain't better for her not to have the kid. Ain't her not having him what she 's always thinking on when she looks like a dead one?"

"How could you know that?"

"'Cause," answered the girl, illustrating her words with a gesture, "I watches her, and I sees her arms going this way, just like as she wanted to hug her kid."

"Possibly you are right," I said, frowning; "but William had put the child out to nurse because it disturbed his night's rest. A man who has his work to do—"

"You are green!"

"Then why have the mother and child been separated?"

"Along of that there measles. Near all the young 'uns in our court has 'em bad."

"Have you had them?"

"I said the young 'uns."

"And William sent the baby to West Kensington to escape infection?"

"Took him, he did."



"Against his wife's wishes?"

"Na-o!"

"You said she was dying for want of the child?"

"Would n't she rayther die than have the kid die?"

"Don't speak so heartlessly, child. Why does William not go straight home from the club? Does he go to West Kensington to see it?"

"'T ain't a hit, it 's an 'e. Course he do."

"Then he should not. His wife has the first claim on him."

"Ain't you green! It 's his missis as wants him to go. Do you think she could sleep till she knowed how the kid was?"

"But he does not go into the house at West Kensington?"

"Is he soft? Course he don't go in, fear of taking the infection to the kid. They just holds the kid up at the window to him, so as he can have a good look. Then he comes home and tells his missis. He sits foot of the bed and tells."

"And that takes place every night? He can't have much to tell."

"He has just."

"He can only say whether the child is well or ill."

"My! He tells what a difference there is in the kid since he seed him last."

"There can be no difference!"

"Go 'long! Ain't a kid always growing? Have n't Mr. Hicking to tell how the hair is getting darker, and heaps of things beside?"

"Such as what?"

"Like whether he larfed, and if he has her nose, and how as he knowed him. He tells her them things more 'n once."

"And all this time he is sitting at the foot of the bed?"

"'Cept when he holds her hand."

"But when does he get to bed himself?"

"He don't get much. He tells her as he has a sleep at the club."

"He cannot say that."

"Hain't I heard him? But he do go to his bed a bit, and then they both lies quiet, her pretending she is sleeping so as he can sleep, and him 'feard to sleep case he should n't wake up to give her the bottle stuff."

"What does the doctor say about her?"

"He 's a good one, the doctor. Sometimes he says she would get better if she could see the kid through the window."

"Nonsense!"

"And if she was took to the country."

"Then why does not William take her?"

"My! you are green! And if she drank port wines."

"Does n't she?"

"No; but William, he tells her about the gentlemen drinking them."

On the tenth day after my conversation with this unattractive child I was in my brougham, with the

windows up, and I sat back, a paper before my face lest any one should look in. Naturally, I was afraid of being seen in company of William's wife and Jenny, for men about town are uncharitable, and, despite the explanation I had ready, might have charged me with pitying William. As a matter of fact, William was sending his wife into Surrey to stay with an old nurse of mine, and I was driving her down because my horses needed an outing. Besides, I was going that way at any rate.

I had arranged that the girl Jenny, who was wearing an outrageous bonnet, should accompany us, because, knowing the greed of her class, I feared she might blackmail me at the club.

William joined us in the suburbs, bringing the baby with him, as I had foreseen they would all be occupied with it, and to save me the trouble of conversing with them. Mrs. Hicking I found too pale and fragile for a workingman's wife, and I formed a mean opinion of her intelligence from her pride in the baby, which was a very ordinary one. She created quite a vulgar scene when it was brought to her, though she had given me her word not to do so, what irritated me even more than her tears being her ill-bred apology that she "had been 'feard baby would n't know her again." I would have told her they did n't know any one for years had I not been afraid of the girl Jenny, who dandled the infant on her knees and talked to it as if it understood. She kept me on tenter-hooks by asking it offensive questions, such as, "'Oo know

who give me that bonnet?" and answering them herself, "It was the pretty gentleman there;" and several times I had to affect sleep because she announced, "Kiddy wants to kiss the pretty gentleman."

Irksome as all this necessarily was to a man of taste, I suffered even more when we reached our destination. As we drove through the village the girl Jenny uttered shrieks of delight at the sight of flowers growing up the cottage walls, and declared they were "just like a music-'all without the drink license." As my horses required a rest, I was forced to abandon my intention of dropping these persons at their lodgings and returning to town at once, and I could not go to the inn lest I should meet inquisitive acquaintances. Disagreeable circumstances, therefore, compelled me to take tea with a waiter's family—close to a window too, through which I could see the girl Jenny talking excitedly to villagers, and telling them, I felt certain, that I had been good to William. I had a desire to go out and put myself right with those people.

William's long connection with the club should have given him some manners, but apparently his class cannot take them on, for, though he knew I regarded his thanks as an insult, he looked them when he was not speaking them, and hardly had he sat down, by my orders, than he remembered that I was a member of the club, and jumped up. Nothing is in worse form than whispering, yet

again and again, when he thought I was not listening, he whispered to Mrs. Hicking, "You don't feel faint?" or "How are you now?" He was also in extravagant glee because she ate two cakes (it takes so little to put these people in good spirits), and when she said she felt like another being already the fellow's face charged me with the change. I could not but conclude, from the way Mrs. Hicking let the baby pound her, that she was stronger than she had pretended.

I remained longer than was necessary, because I had something to say to William which I knew he would misunderstand, and so I put off saying it. But when he announced that it was time for him to return to London,—at which his wife suddenly paled, so that he had to sign to her not to break down,—I delivered the message.

"William," I said, "the head waiter asked me to say that you could take a fortnight's holiday just now. Your wages will be paid as usual."

Confound them! William had me by the hand, and his wife was in tears before I could reach the door.

"Is it your doing again, sir?" William cried.

"William!" I said, fiercely.

"We owe everything to you," he insisted. "The port wine—"

"Because I had no room for it in my cellar."

"The money for the nurse in London—"

"Because I objected to being waited on by a man who got no sleep."

"These lodgings—"

"Because I wanted to do something for my old nurse."

"And now, sir, a fortnight's holiday!"

"Good-bye, William!" I said, in a fury.

But before I could get away Mrs. Hicking signed to William to leave the room, and then she kissed my hand. She said something to me. It was about my wife. Somehow I— What business had William to tell her about my wife?

They are all back in Drury Lane now, and William tells me that his wife sings at her work just as she did eight years ago. I have no interest in this, and try to check his talk of it; but such people have no sense of propriety, and he even speaks of the girl Jenny, who sent me lately a gaudy pair of worsted gloves worked by her own hand. The meanest advantage they took of my weakness, however, was in calling their baby after me. I have an uncomfortable suspicion, too, that William has given the other waiters his version of the affair; but I feel safe so long as it does not reach the committee.



# THE BLACK POODLE

BY  
F. ANSTEY





## THE BLACK POODLE

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I HAVE set myself the task of relating in the course of this story, without suppressing or altering a single detail, the most painful and humiliating episode in my life.

I do this, not because it will give me the least pleasure, but simply because it affords me an opportunity of extenuating myself, which has hitherto been wholly denied to me.

As a general rule, I am quite aware that to publish a lengthy explanation of one's conduct in any questionable transaction is not the best means of recovering a lost reputation ; but in my own case there is one to whom I shall nevermore be permitted to justify myself by word of mouth—even if I found myself able to attempt it. And as she could not possibly think worse of me than she does at present, I write this, knowing it can do me no harm, and faintly hoping that it may come to her notice and suggest a doubt whether I am quite so unscrupulous a villain, so consummate a hypocrite, as I have been forced to appear in her eyes.

The bare chance of such a result makes me perfectly indifferent to all else ; I cheerfully expose to the derision of the whole reading world the story

of my weakness and my shame, since by doing so I may possibly rehabilitate myself somewhat in the good opinion of one person.

Having said so much, I will begin my confession without further delay.

My name is Algernon Weatherhead, and I may add that I am in one of the government departments, that I am an only son, and live at home with my mother.

We had had a house at Hammersmith until just before the period covered by this history, when, our lease expiring, my mother decided that my health required country air at the close of the day, and so we took a "desirable villa residence" on one of the many new building estates which have lately sprung up in such profusion in the home counties.

We have called it "Wistaria Villa." It is a pretty little place, the last of a row of detached villas, each with its tiny rustic carriage-gate and gravel sweep in front, and lawn enough for a tennis-court behind, which lines the road leading over the hill to the railway-station.

I could certainly have wished that our landlord, shortly after giving us the agreement, could have found some other place to hang himself in than one of our attics, for the consequence was that a housemaid left us in violent hysterics about every two months, having learned the tragedy from the tradespeople, and naturally "seen a somethink" immediately afterward.

Still it is a pleasant house, and I can now almost forgive the landlord for what I shall always consider an act of gross selfishness on his part.

In the country, even so near town, a next-door neighbour is something more than a mere numeral; he is a possible acquaintance, who will at least consider a new-comer as worth the experiment of a call. I soon knew that "Shuturgarden," the next house to our own, was occupied by a Colonel Currie, a retired Indian officer; and often, as across the low boundary wall I caught a glimpse of a graceful girlish figure flitting about among the rose-bushes in the neighbouring garden, I would lose myself in pleasant anticipations of a time not far distant when the wall which separated us would be (metaphorically) levelled.

I remember—ah, how vividly!—the thrill of excitement with which I heard from my mother, on returning from town one evening, that the Curries had called, and seemed disposed to be all that was neighbourly and kind.

I remember, too, the Sunday afternoon on which I returned their call—alone, as my mother had already done so during the week. I was standing on the steps of the colonel's villa, waiting for the door to open, when I was startled by a furious snarling and yapping behind, and, looking round, discovered a large poodle in the act of making for my legs.

He was a coal-black poodle, with half of his right ear gone, and absurd little thick moustaches

at the end of his nose ; he was shaved in the sham-lion fashion, which is considered, for some mysterious reason, to improve a poodle, but the barber had left sundry little tufts of hair, which studded his haunches capriciously.

I could not help being reminded, as I looked at him, of another black poodle, which Faust entertained for a short time with unhappy results, and I thought that a very moderate degree of incantation would be enough to bring the fiend out of this brute.

He made me intensely uncomfortable, for I am of a slightly nervous temperament, with a constitutional horror of dogs, and a liability to attacks of diffidence on performing the ordinary social rites under the most favourable conditions, and certainly the consciousness that a strange and apparently savage dog was engaged in worrying the heels of my boots was the reverse of reassuring.

The Currie family received me with all possible kindness. "So charmed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Weatherhead," said Mrs. Currie, as I shook hands. "I see," she added, pleasantly, "you 've brought the doggie in with you." As a matter of fact, I had brought the doggie in at the ends of my coat-tails ; but it was evidently no unusual occurrence for visitors to appear in this undignified manner, for she detached him quite as a matter of course, and as soon as I was sufficiently collected we fell into conversation.

I discovered that the colonel and his wife were

childless, and the slender willowy figure I had seen across the garden wall was that of Lilian Roseblade, their niece and adopted daughter. She came into the room shortly afterward, and I felt, as I went through the form of an introduction, that her sweet, fresh face, shaded by soft masses of dusky-brown hair, more than justified all the dreamy hopes and fancies with which I had looked forward to that moment.

She talked to me in a pretty, confidential, appealing way, which I have heard her dearest friends censure as childish and affected; but I thought then that her manner had an indescribable charm and fascination about it, and the memory of it makes my heart ache now with a pang that is not all pain.

Even before the colonel made his appearance I had begun to see that my enemy, the poodle, occupied an exceptional position in that household. It was abundantly clear by the time I took my leave.

He seemed to be the centre of their domestic system, and even lovely Lilian revolved contentedly around him as a kind of satellite; he could do no wrong in his owner's eyes, his prejudices (and he was a narrow-minded animal) were rigorously respected, and all domestic arrangements were made with a primary view to his convenience.

I may be wrong, but I cannot think that it is wise to put any poodle upon such a pedestal as that. How this one in particular, as ordinary a

quadruped as ever breathed, had contrived to impose thus upon his infatuated proprietors, I never could understand, but so it was; he even engrossed the chief part of the conversation, which after any lull seemed to veer round to him by a sort of natural law.

I had to endure a long biographical sketch of him,—what a society paper would call an “anecdotal photo,”—and each fresh anecdote seemed to me to exhibit the depraved malignity of the beast in a more glaring light, and render the doting admiration of the family more astounding than ever.

“Did you tell Mr. Weatherhead, Lily, about Bingo” (Bingo was the poodle’s preposterous name) “and Tacks? No? Oh, I *must* tell him that; it’ll make him laugh. Tacks is our gardener down in the village (d’ ye know Tacks?). Well, Tacks was up here the other day, nailing up some trellis-work at the top of a ladder, and all the time there was Master Bingo sitting quietly at the foot of it looking on; would n’t leave it on any account. Tacks said he was quite company for him. Well, at last, when Tacks had finished and was coming down, what do you think that rascal there did? Just sneaked quietly up behind and nipped him in both calves and ran off. Been looking out for that the whole time! Ha, ha!—deep that, eh?”

I agreed, with an inward shudder, that it was very deep, thinking privately that, if this was a

specimen of Bingo's usual treatment of the natives, it would be odd if he did not find himself deeper still before—probably *just* before—he died.

“Poor, faithful old doggie!” murmured Mrs. Currie; “he thought Tacks was a nasty burglar, did n't he? He was n't going to see master robbed, was he?”

“Capital house-dog, sir,” struck in the colonel. “Gad, I shall never forget how he made poor Heavisides run for it the other day! Ever met Heavisides of the Bombay Fusileers? Well, Heavisides was staying here, and the dog met him one morning as he was coming down from the bath-room. Did n't recognise him in ‘pajamas’ and a dressing-gown, of course, and made at him. He kept poor old Heavisides outside the landing window on the top of the cistern for a quarter of an hour, till I had to come and raise the siege!”

Such were the stories of that abandoned dog's blunderheaded ferocity to which I was forced to listen, while all the time the brute sat opposite me on the hearth-rug, blinking at me from under his shaggy mane with his evil, bleared eyes, and deliberating where he would have me when I rose to go.

This was the beginning of an intimacy which soon displaced all ceremony. It was very pleasant to go in there after dinner, even to sit with the colonel over his claret, and hear more stories about Bingo; for afterward I could go into the pretty drawing-room and take my tea from Lilian's hands,



and listen while she played Schubert to us in the summer twilight.

The poodle was always in the way, to be sure, but even his ugly black head seemed to lose some of its ugliness and ferocity when Lilian laid her pretty hand on it.

On the whole, I think that the Currie family were well disposed toward me, the colonel considering me as a harmless specimen of the average eligible young man,—which I certainly was,—and Mrs. Currie showing me favour for my mother's sake, for whom she had taken a strong liking.

As for Lilian, I believed I saw that she soon suspected the state of my feelings toward her, and was not displeased by it. I looked forward with some hopefulness to a day when I could declare myself with no fear of a repulse.

But it was a serious obstacle in my path that I could not secure Bingo's good opinion on any terms. The family would often lament this pathetically themselves. "You see," Mrs. Currie would observe in apology, "Bingo is a dog that does not attach himself easily to strangers"—though, for that matter, I thought he was unpleasantly ready to attach himself to *me*.

I did try hard to conciliate him. I brought him propitiatory buns, which was weak and ineffectual, as he ate them with avidity, and hated me as bitterly as ever; for he had conceived from the first a profound contempt for me, and a distrust which no blandishments of mine could remove. Look-

ing back now, I am inclined to think it was a prophetic instinct that warned him of what was to come upon him through my instrumentality.

Only his approbation was wanting to establish for me a firm footing with the Curries, and perhaps determine Lilian's wavering heart in my direction; but, though I wooed that inflexible poodle with an assiduity I blush to remember, he remained obstinately firm.

Still, day by day, Lilian's treatment of me was more encouraging; day by day I gained in the esteem of her uncle and aunt; I began to hope that soon I should be able to disregard canine influence altogether.

Now there was one inconvenience about our villa (besides its flavour of suicide) which it is necessary to mention here. By common consent all the cats of the neighbourhood had selected our garden for their evening reunions. I fancy that a tortoise-shell kitchen cat of ours must have been a sort of leader of local feline society—I know she was “at home,” with music and recitations, on most evenings.

My poor mother found this interfere with her after-dinner nap, and no wonder; for if a cohort of ghosts had been “shrieking and squealing,” as Calpurnia puts it, in our back garden, or it had been fitted up as a crèche for a nursery of goblin infants in the agonies of teething, the noise could not possibly have been more unearthly.

We sought for some means of getting rid of the nuisance: there was poison, of course; but we

thought it would have an invidious appearance, and even lead to legal difficulties, if each dawn were to discover an assortment of cats expiring in hideous convulsions in various parts of the same garden.

Firearms too were open to objection, and would scarcely assist my mother's slumbers ; so for some time we were at a loss for a remedy. At last, one day, walking down the Strand, I chanced to see (in an evil hour) what struck me as the very thing : it was an air-gun of superior construction, displayed in a gunsmith's window. I went in at once, purchased it, and took it home in triumph ; it would be noiseless, and would reduce the local average of cats without scandal,—one or two examples,—and feline fashion would soon migrate to a more secluded spot.

I lost no time in putting this to the proof. That same evening I lay in wait after dusk at the study window, protecting my mother's repose. As soon as I heard the long-drawn wail, the preliminary sputter, and the wild stampede that followed, I let fly in the direction of the sound. I suppose I must have something of the national sporting instinct in me, for my blood was tingling with excitement ; but the feline constitution assimilates lead without serious inconvenience, and I began to fear that no trophy would remain to bear witness to my marksmanship.

But all at once I made out a dark, indistinct form slinking in from behind the bushes. I waited till it crossed a belt of light which streamed from

the back kitchen below me, and then I took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

This time at least I had not failed; there was a smothered yell, a rustle, and then silence again. I ran out with the calm pride of a successful revenge to bring in the body of my victim, and I found underneath a laurel no predatory tom-cat, but (as the discerning reader will no doubt have foreseen long since) the quivering carcass of the colonel's black poodle!

I intend to set down here the exact unvarnished truth, and I confess that at first, when I knew what I had done, I was *not* sorry. I was quite innocent of any intention of doing it, but I felt no regret. I even laughed—madman that I was—at the thought that there was the end of Bingo, at all events; that impediment was removed; my weary task of conciliation was over for ever!

But soon the reaction came; I realised the tremendous nature of my deed, and shuddered. I had done that which might banish me from Lilian's side for ever! All unwittingly I had slaughtered a kind of sacred beast, the animal around which the Currie household had wreathed their choicest affections! How was I to break it to them? Should I send Bingo in, with a card tied to his neck and my regrets and compliments? That was too much like a present of game. Ought I not to carry him in myself? I would wreathe him in the best crape, I would put on black for him; the Curries would hardly consider a taper and a white sheet, or sack-

cloth and ashes, an excessive form of atonement, but I could not grovel to quite such an abject extent.

I wondered what the colonel would say. Simple and hearty, as a general rule, he had a hot temper on occasions, and it made me ill as I thought, would he and, worse still, would *Lilian* believe it was really an accident? They knew what an interest I had in silencing the deceased poodle—would they believe the simple truth?

I vowed that they *should* believe me. My genuine remorse and the absence of all concealment on my part would speak powerfully for me. I would choose a favourable time for my confession; that very evening I would tell all.

Still I shrank from the duty before me, and, as I knelt down sorrowfully by the dead form and respectfully composed his stiffening limbs, I thought that it was unjust of fate to place a well-meaning man, whose nerves were not of iron, in such a position.

Then, to my horror, I heard a well-known ringing tramp on the road outside, and smelled the peculiar fragrance of a Burmese cheroot. It was the colonel himself, who had been taking out the doomed Bingo for his usual evening run.

I don't know how it was, exactly, but a sudden panic came over me. I held my breath, and tried to crouch down unseen behind the laurels; but he had seen me, and came over at once to speak to me across the hedge.

He stood there, not two yards from his favourite's body! Fortunately it was unusually dark that evening.

"Ha, there you are, eh?" he began, heartily; "don't rise, my boy, don't rise."

I was trying to put myself in front of the poodle, and did not rise—at least, only my hair did.

"You 're out late, ain't you?" he went on; "laying out your garden, hey?"

I could not tell him that I was laying out his poodle! My voice shook as, with a guilty confusion that was veiled by the dusk, I said it was a fine evening—which it was not.

"Cloudy, sir," said the colonel, "cloudy; rain before morning, I think. By the way, have you seen anything of my Bingo in here?"

This was the turning-point. What I *ought* to have done was to say mournfully, "Yes, I'm sorry to say I've had a most unfortunate accident with him. Here he is; the fact is, I'm afraid I've *shot* him!"

But I could n't. I could have told him at my own time, in a prepared form of words—but not then. I felt I must use all my wits to gain time, and fence with the questions.

"Why," I said, with a leaden airiness, "he has n't given you the slip, has he?"

"Never did such a thing in his life!" said the colonel, warmly; "he rushed off after a rat or a frog or something a few minutes ago, and as I stopped to light another cheroot I lost sight of

him. I thought I saw him slip in under your gate, but I've been calling him from the front there and he won't come out."

No, and he never *would* come out any more. But the colonel must not be told that just yet. I temporised again: "If," I said, unsteadily—"if he had slipped in under the gate I should have seen him. Perhaps he took it into his head to run home?"

"Oh, I shall find him on the door-step, I expect, the knowing old scamp! Why, what d' ye think was the last thing he did, now?"

I could have given him the very latest intelligence, but I dared not. However, it was altogether too ghastly to kneel there and laugh at anecdotes of Bingo told across Bingo's dead body; I could not stand that! "Listen," I said, suddenly, "was n't that his bark? There, again; it seems to come from the front of your house, don't you think?"

"Well," said the colonel, "I'll go and fasten him up before he's off again. How your teeth are chattering! You've caught a chill, man; go indoors at once, and, if you feel equal to it, look in half an hour later, about grog-time, and I'll tell you all about it. Compliments to your mother. Don't forget—about grog-time!"

I had got rid of him at last, and I wiped my forehead, gasping with relief. I would go round in half an hour, and then I should be prepared to make my melancholy announcement. For, even then, I never

thought of any other course, until suddenly it flashed upon me with terrible clearness that my miserable shuffling by the hedge had made it impossible to tell the truth! I had not told a direct lie, to be sure, but then I had given the colonel the impression that I had denied having seen the dog. Many people can appease their consciences by reflecting that, whatever may be the effect their words produce, they did contrive to steer clear of a downright lie. I never quite knew where the distinction lay morally, but there *is* that feeling—I have it myself.

Unfortunately, prevarication has this drawback: that, if ever the truth comes to light, the prevaricator is in just the same case as if he had lied to the most shameless extent, and for a man to point out that the words he used contained no absolute falsehood will seldom restore confidence.

I might, of course, still tell the colonel of my misfortune, and leave him to infer that it had happened after our interview; but the poodle was fast becoming cold and stiff, and they would most probably suspect the real time of the occurrence.

And then Lilian would hear that I had told a string of falsehoods to her uncle over the dead body of their idolised Bingo—an act, no doubt, of abominable desecration, of unspeakable profanity, in her eyes.

If it would have been difficult before to prevail on her to accept a blood-stained hand, it would be impossible after that. No, I had burned my ships, I was cut off for ever from the straightfor-



ward course; that one moment of indecision had decided my conduct in spite of me; I must go on with it now, and keep up the deception at all hazards.

It was bitter. I had always tried to preserve as many of the moral principles which had been instilled into me as can be conveniently retained in this grasping world, and it had been my pride that, roughly speaking, I had never been guilty of an unmistakable falsehood.

But henceforth, if I meant to win Lilian, that boast must be relinquished for ever. I should have to lie now with all my might, without limit or scruple, to dissemble incessantly, and "wear a mask," as the poet Bunn beautifully expressed it long ago, "over my hollow heart." I felt all this keenly; I did not think it was right, but what was I to do?

After thinking all this out very carefully, I decided that my only course was to bury the poor animal where he fell, and say nothing about it. With some vague idea of precaution, I first took off the silver collar he wore, and then hastily interred him with a garden-trowel, and succeeded in removing all traces of the disaster.

I fancy I felt a certain relief in the knowledge that there would now be no necessity to tell my pitiful story and risk the loss of my neighbours' esteem.

By-and-by, I thought, I would plant a rose-tree over his remains, and some day, as Lilian and I, in the noontide of our domestic bliss, stood before it

admiring its creamy luxuriance, I might (perhaps) find courage to confess that the tree owed some of that luxuriance to the long-lost Bingo.

There was a touch of poetry in this idea that lightened my gloom for the moment.

I need scarcely say that I did not go round to Shuturgarden that evening. I was not hardened enough for that yet; my manner might betray me, and so I very prudently stayed at home.

But that night my sleep was broken by frightful dreams. I was perpetually trying to bury a great, gaunt poodle, which would persist in rising up through the damp mould as fast as I covered him up. . . . Lilian and I were engaged, and we were in church together on Sunday, and the poodle, resisting all attempts to eject him, forbade our bans with sepulchral barks. . . . It was our wedding-day, and at the critical moment the poodle leaped between us and swallowed the ring. . . . Or we were at the wedding-breakfast, and Bingo, a grisly black skeleton with flaming eyes, sat on the cake and would not allow Lilian to cut it. Even the rose-tree fancy was reproduced in a distorted form—the tree grew, and every blossom contained a miniature Bingo, which barked; and as I woke I was desperately trying to persuade the colonel that they were ordinary dog-roses.

I went up to the office next day with my gloomy secret gnawing my bosom, and, whatever I did, the spectre of the murdered poodle rose before me. For two days after that I dared not go near

the Curries, until at last one evening after dinner I forced myself to call, feeling that it was really not safe to keep away any longer.

My conscience smote me as I went in. I put on an unconscious, easy manner, which was such a dismal failure that it was lucky for me that they were too much engrossed to notice it.

I never before saw a family so stricken down by a domestic misfortune as the group I found in the drawing-room, making a dejected pretence of reading or working. We talked at first—and hollow talk it was—on indifferent subjects, till I could bear it no longer, and plunged boldly into danger.

"I don't see the dog," I began. "I suppose you—you found him all right the other evening, colonel?" I wondered, as I spoke, whether they would not notice the break in my voice, but they did not.

"Why, the fact is," said the colonel, heavily, gnawing his gray moustache, "we 've not heard anything of him since; he 's—he 's run off!"

"Gone, Mr. Weatherhead; gone without a word!" said Mrs. Currie, plaintively, as if she thought the dog might at least have left an address.

"I would n't have believed it of him," said the colonel; "it has completely knocked me over. Have n't been so cut up for years—the ungrateful rascal!"

"O uncle!" pleaded Lilian, "don't talk like that; perhaps Bingo could n't help it—perhaps some one has s-s-shot him!"

"Shot!" cried the colonel, angrily. "By heaven! if I thought there was a villain on earth capable of shooting that poor, inoffensive dog, I 'd— Why *should* they shoot him, Lilian? Tell me that! I—I hope you won't let me hear you talk like that again. *You* don't think he 's shot, eh, Weatherhead?"

I said—Heaven forgive me!—that I thought it highly improbable.

"He 's not dead!" cried Mrs. Currie. "If he were dead I should know it somehow—I 'm sure I should! But I 'm certain he 's alive. Only last night I had such a beautiful dream about him. I thought he came back to us, Mr. Weatherhead, driving up in a hansom-cab, and he was just the same as ever—only he wore blue spectacles, and the shaved part of him was painted a bright red. And I woke up with the joy—so, you know, it 's sure to come true!"

It will be easily understood what torture conversations like these were to me, and how I hated myself as I sympathised and spoke encouraging words concerning the dog's recovery, when I knew all the time he was lying hid under my garden mould. But I took it as a part of my punishment, and bore it all uncomplainingly; practice even made me an adept in the art of consolation—I believe I really was a great comfort to them.

I had hoped that they would soon get over the first bitterness of their loss, and that Bingo would be first replaced and then forgotten in the usual

way ; but there seemed no signs of this coming to pass.

The poor colonel was too plainly fretting himself ill about it ; he went pottering about forlornly, advertising, searching, and seeing people, but all, of course, to no purpose ; and it told upon him. He was more like a man whose only son and heir had been stolen than an Anglo-Indian officer who had lost a poodle. I had to affect the liveliest interest in all his inquiries and expeditions, and to listen to and echo the most extravagant eulogies of the departed ; and the wear and tear of so much duplicity made me at last almost as ill as the colonel himself.

I could not help seeing that Lilian was not nearly so much impressed by my elaborate concern as her relatives, and sometimes I detected an incredulous look in her frank brown eyes that made me very uneasy. Little by little, a rift widened between us, until at last in despair I determined to know the worst before the time came when it would be hopeless to speak at all. I chose a Sunday evening as we were walking across the green from church in the golden dusk, and then I ventured to speak to her of my love. She heard me to the end, and was evidently very much agitated. At last she murmured that it could not be, unless—no, it never could be now.

“ Unless what ? ” I asked. “ Lilian—Miss Roseblade, something has come between us lately ; you will tell me what that something is, won't you ? ”

"Do you want to know *really*?" she said, looking up at me through her tears. "Then I'll tell you; it—it's Bingo!"

I started back overwhelmed. Did she know all? If not, how much did she suspect? I must find out that at once! "What about Bingo?" I managed to pronounce, with a dry tongue.

"You never loved him when he was here," she sobbed; "you know you did n't!"

I was relieved to find it was no worse than this.

"No," I said, candidly; "I did not love Bingo. Bingo did n't love *me*, Lilian; he was always looking out for a chance of nipping me somewhere. Surely you won't quarrel with me for that!"

"Not for that," she said; "only, why do you pretend to be so fond of him now, and so anxious to get him back again? Uncle John believes you, but *I* don't. I can see quite well that you would n't be glad to find him. You could find him easily if you wanted to!"

"What do you mean, Lilian?" I said, hoarsely. "*How* could I find him?" Again I feared the worst.

"You're in a government office," cried Lilian, "and if you only chose, you could easily g-get g-government to find Bingo! What's the use of government if it can't do that? Mr. Travers would have found him long ago if I'd asked him!"

Lilian had never been so childishly unreasonable as this before, and yet I loved her more madly than ever; but I did not like this allusion

to Travers, a rising barrister, who lived with his sister in a pretty cottage near the station, and had shown symptoms of being attracted by Lilian.

He was away on circuit just then, luckily; but, at least, even he would have found it a hard task to find Bingo—there was comfort in that.

"You know that is n't just, Lilian," I observed; "but only tell me what you want me to do."

"Bub—bub—bring back Bingo!" she said.

"Bring back Bingo!" I cried, in horror. "But suppose I *can't*—suppose he 's out of the country, or—dead, what then, Lilian?"

"I can't help it," she said, "but I don't believe he *is* out of the country or dead. And while I see you pretending to uncle that you cared awfully about him, and going on doing nothing at all, it makes me think you 're not quite—quite *sincere*! And I could n't possibly marry any one while I thought that of him. And I shall always have that feeling unless you find Bingo!"

It was of no use to argue with her; I knew Lilian by that time. With her pretty, caressing manner she united a latent obstinacy which it was hopeless to attempt to shake. I feared, too, that she was not quite certain as yet whether she cared for me or not, and that this condition of hers was an expedient to gain time.

I left her with a heavy heart. Unless I proved my worth by bringing back Bingo within a very short time, Travers would probably have everything his own way. And Bingo was dead!

However, I took heart. I thought that perhaps if I could succeed by my earnest efforts in persuading Lilian that I really was doing all in my power to recover the poodle, she might relent in time, and dispense with his actual production.

So, partly with this object, and partly to appease the remorse which now revived and stung me deeper than before, I undertook long and weary pilgrimages after office hours. I spent many pounds in advertisements; I interviewed dogs of every size, colour, and breed, and of course I took care to keep Lilian informed of each successive failure. But still her heart was not touched; she was firm. If I went on like that, she told me, I was certain to find Bingo one day; then, but not before, would her doubts be set at rest.

I was walking one day through the somewhat squalid district which lies between Bow Street and High Holborn, when I saw, in a small theatrical costumer's window, a hand-bill stating that a black poodle had "followed a gentleman" on a certain date, and if not claimed and the finder remunerated before a stated time would be sold to pay expenses.

I went in and got a copy of the bill to show Lilian, and, although by that time I scarcely dared to look a poodle in the face, I thought I would go to the address given and see the animal, simply to be able to tell Lilian I had done so.

The gentleman whom the dog had very unaccountably followed was a certain Mr. William



Blagg, who kept a little shop near Endell Street, and called himself a bird-fancier, though I should scarcely have credited him with the necessary imagination. He was an evil-browed ruffian in a fur cap, with a broad broken nose and little shifty red eyes; and after I had told him what I wanted he took me through a horrible little den, stacked with piles of wooden, wire, and wicker prisons, each quivering with restless, twittering life, and then out into a back yard, in which were two or three rotten old kennels and tubs. "That there 's him," he said, jerking his thumb to the farthest tub; "follered me all the way 'ome from Kinsington Gardings, *he* did. Kim out, will yer?"

And out of the tub there crawled slowly, with a snuffling whimper and a rattling of its chain, the identical dog I had slain a few evenings before!

At least, so I thought for a moment, and felt as if I had seen a spectre; the resemblance was so exact—in size, in every detail, even to the little clumps of hair about the hind parts, even to the lop of half an ear, this dog might have been the *doppelgänger* of the deceased Bingo. I suppose, after all, one black poodle is very like any other black poodle of the same size, but the likeness startled me.

I think it was then that the idea occurred to me that here was a miraculous chance of securing the sweetest girl in the whole world, and at the same time atoning for my wrong by bringing back gladness with me to Shuturgarden. It only needed a

little boldness; one last deception, and I could embrace truthfulness once more.

Almost unconsciously, when my guide turned round and asked, "Is that there dawg yourn?" I said hurriedly, "Yes, yes; that 's the dog I want; that—that 's Bingo!"

"He don't seem to be a-puttin' of 'isself out about seein' you again," observed Mr. Blagg, as the poodle studied me with a calm interest.

"Oh, he 's not exactly *my* dog, you see," I said; "he belongs to a friend of mine!"

He gave me a quick, furtive glance. "Then maybe you 're mistook about him," he said, "and I can't run no risks. I was a-goin' down in the country this 'ere werry evenin' to see a party as lives at Wistaria Willa; he 's been a-hadwertisin' about a black poodle, *he* has!"

"But look here," I said; "that 's *me*."

He gave me a curious leer. "No offence, you know, guv'nor," he said, "but I should wish for some evidence as to that afore I part with a vally-able dawg like this 'ere!"

"Well," I said, "here 's one of my cards; will that do for you?"

He took it and spelled it out with a pretence of great caution; but I saw well enough that the old scoundrel suspected that if I had lost a dog at all it was not this particular dog. "Ah," he said, as he put it in his pocket, "if I part with him to you I must be cleared of all risks. I can't afford to get into trouble about no mistakes. Unless you

likes to leave him for a day or two you must pay accordin', you see."

I wanted to get the hateful business over as soon as possible. I did not care what I paid—Lilian was worth all the expense! I said I had no doubt myself as to the real ownership of the animal, but I would give him any sum in reason, and would remove the dog at once.

And so we settled it. I paid him an extortionate sum, and came away with a duplicate poodle, a canine counterfeit, which I hoped to pass off at Shuturgarden as the long-lost Bingo.

I know it was wrong,—it even came unpleasantly near dog-stealing,—but I was a desperate man. I saw Lilian gradually slipping away from me, I knew that nothing short of this could ever recall her, I was sorely tempted, I had gone far on the same road already; it was the old story of being hung for a sheep. And so I fell.

Surely some who read this will be generous enough to consider the peculiar state of the case, and mingle a little pity with their contempt.

I was dining in town that evening, and took my purchase home by a late train; his demeanour was grave and intensely respectable; he was not the animal to commit himself by any flagrant indiscretion; he was gentle and tractable too, and in all respects an agreeable contrast in character to the original. Still, it may have been the after-dinner workings of conscience, but I could not help fancying that I saw a certain look in the creature's eyes,

as if he were aware that he was required to connive at a fraud, and rather resented it.

If he would only be good enough to back me up! Fortunately, however, he was such a perfect facsimile of the outward Bingo that the risk of detection was really inconsiderable.

When I got him home I put Bingo's silver collar round his neck, congratulating myself on my forethought in preserving it, and took him in to see my mother. She accepted him as what he seemed without the slightest misgiving; but this, though it encouraged me to go on, was not decisive—the spurious poodle would have to encounter the scrutiny of those who knew every tuft on the genuine animal's body!

Nothing would have induced me to undergo such an ordeal as that of personally restoring him to the Curries. We gave him supper, and tied him up on the lawn, where he howled dolefully all night and buried bones.

The next morning I wrote a note to Mrs. Currie, expressing my pleasure at being able to restore the lost one, and another to Lilian, containing only the words, “Will you believe *now* that I am sincere?” Then I tied both round the poodle's neck, and dropped him over the wall into the colonel's garden just before I started to catch my train to town.

I had an anxious walk home from the station that evening; I went round by the longer way,

trembling the whole time lest I should meet any of the Currie household, to which I felt myself entirely unequal just then. I could not rest until I knew whether my fraud had succeeded, or if the poodle to which I had intrusted my fate had basely betrayed me; but my suspense was happily ended as soon as I entered my mother's room. "You can't think how delighted those poor Curries were to see Bingo again," she said at once; "and they said such charming things about you, Algy—Lilian particularly; quite affected she seemed, poor child! And they wanted you to go round and dine there and be thanked to-night, but at last I persuaded them to come to us instead. And they're going to bring the dog to make friends. Oh, and I met Frank Travers; he's back from circuit again now, so I asked him in too to meet them!"

I drew a deep breath of relief. I had played a desperate game, but I had won! I could have wished, to be sure, that my mother had not thought of bringing in Travers on that of all evenings, but I hoped that I could defy him after this.

The colonel and his people were the first to arrive, he and his wife being so effusively grateful that they made me very uncomfortable indeed; Lilian met me with downcast eyes and the faintest possible blush, but she said nothing just then. Five minutes afterward, when she and I were alone together in the conservatory, where I had brought her on pretence of showing a new begonia, she laid her hand on my sleeve and whispered, almost

shyly, "Mr. Weatherhead—Algernon! Can you ever forgive me for being so cruel and unjust to you?" And I replied that, upon the whole, I could.

We were not in that conservatory long, but before we left it beautiful Lilian Roseblade had consented to make my life happy. When we reëntered the drawing-room we found Frank Travers, who had been told the story of the recovery; and I observed his jaw fall as he glanced at our faces, and noted the triumphant smile which I have no doubt mine wore, and the tender, dreamy look in Lilian's soft eyes. Poor Travers! I was sorry for him, although I was not fond of him. Travers was a good type of the rising young common-law barrister, tall, not bad-looking, with keen dark eyes, black whiskers, and the mobile forensic mouth which can express every shade of feeling, from deferential assent to cynical incredulity; possessed, too, of an endless flow of conversation that was decidedly agreeable, if a trifle too laboriously so, he had been a dangerous rival. But all that was over now; he saw it himself at once, and during dinner sank into dismal silence, gazing pathetically at Lilian, and sighing almost obtrusively between the courses. His stream of small talk seemed to have been cut off at the main.

"You've done a kind thing, Weatherhead," said the colonel. "I can't tell you all that dog is to me, and how I missed the poor beast. I'd quite given up all hope of ever seeing him again, and

all the time there was Weatherhead, Mr. Travers, quietly searching all London till he found him! I sha'n't forget it. It shows a really kind feeling."

I saw by Travers's face that he was telling himself he would have found fifty Bingos in half the time—if he had only thought of it; he smiled a melancholy assent to all the colonel said, and then began to study me with an obviously depreciatory air.

"You can't think," I heard Mrs. Currie telling my mother, "how really *touching* it was to see poor dear Bingo's emotion at seeing all the old familiar objects again! He went up and sniffed at them all in turn, quite plainly recognising everything. And he was quite put out to find that we had moved his favourite ottoman out of the drawing-room. But he *is* so penitent too, and so ashamed of having run away; he hardly dares to come when John calls him, and he kept under a chair in the hall all the morning; he would n't come in here, either, so we had to leave him in your garden."

"He 's been sadly out of spirits all day," said Lilian; "he has n't bitten one of the tradespeople."

"Oh, *he* 's all right, the rascal!" said the colonel, cheerily. "He 'll be after the cats again as well as ever in a day or two."

"Ah, those cats!" said my poor innocent mother. "Algy, you have n't tried the air-gun on them again lately, have you? They 're worse than ever."

I troubled the colonel to pass the claret. Travers laughed for the first time. "That 's a good idea,"

he said, in that carrying "bar-mess" voice of his; "an air-gun for cats, ha, ha! Make good bags, eh, Weatherhead?" I said that I did, *very* good bags, and felt I was getting painfully red in the face.

"Oh, Algy is an excellent shot—quite a sportsman," said my mother. "I remember, oh, long ago, when we lived at Hammersmith, he had a pistol, and he used to strew crumbs in the garden for the sparrows, and shoot at them out of the pantry window; he frequently hit one."

"Well," said the colonel, not much impressed by these sporting reminiscences, "don't go rolling over our Bingo by mistake, you know, Weatherhead, my boy. Not but what you've a sort of right after this—only don't. I would n't go through it all twice for anything."

"If you really won't take any more wine," I said, hurriedly, addressing the colonel and Travers, "suppose we all go out and have our coffee on the lawn? It—it will be cooler there." For it was getting very hot indoors, I thought.

I left Travers to amuse the ladies—he could do no more harm now; and, taking the colonel aside, I seized the opportunity, as we strolled up and down the garden path, to ask his consent to Lilian's engagement to me. He gave it cordially. "There's not a man in England," he said, "that I'd sooner see her married to after to-day. You're a quiet, steady young fellow, and you've a good kind heart. As for the money, that's neither here nor there;



Lilian won't come to you without a penny, you know. But really, my boy, you can hardly believe what it is to my poor wife and me to see that dog. Why, bless my soul, look at him now! What 's the matter with him, eh? "

To my unutterable horror, I saw that that miserable poodle, after begging unnoticed at the tea-table for some time, had retired to an open space before it, where he was now industriously standing on his head.

We gathered round and examined the animal curiously, as he continued to balance himself gravely in his abnormal position. "Good gracious, John," cried Mrs. Currie, "I never saw Bingo do such a thing before in his life!"

"Very odd," said the colonel, putting up his glasses; "never learned that from *me*."

"I tell you what I fancy it is," I suggested, wildly. "You see, he was always a sensitive, excitable animal, and perhaps the—the sudden joy of his return has gone to his head—*upset* him, you know."

They seemed disposed to accept this solution, and, indeed, I believe they would have credited Bingo with every conceivable degree of sensibility; but I felt myself that if this unhappy animal had many more of these accomplishments I was undone, for the original Bingo had never been a dog of parts.

"It 's very odd," said Travers, reflectively, as the dog recovered his proper level, "but I always

thought that it was half the *right* ear that Bingo had lost."

"So it is, is n't it?" said the colonel. "Left, eh? Well, I thought myself it was the right."

My heart almost stopped with terror; I had altogether forgotten that. I hastened to set the point at rest. "Oh, it *was* the left," I said, positively; "I know it because I remember so particularly thinking how odd it was that it *should* be the left ear, and not the right!" I told myself this should be positively my last lie.

"*Why* odd?" asked Frank Travers, with his most offensive Socratic manner.

"My dear fellow, I can't tell you," I said, impatiently; "everything seems odd when you come to think at all about it."

"Algernon," said Lilian, later on, "will you tell Aunt Mary and Mr. Travers and—and me how it was you came to find Bingo? Mr. Travers is quite anxious to hear all about it."

I could not very well refuse; I sat down and told the story, all my own way. I painted Blagg perhaps rather bigger and blacker than life, and described an exciting scene, in which I recognised Bingo by his collar in the streets, and claimed and bore him off then and there in spite of all opposition.

I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing Travers grinding his teeth with envy as I went on, and feeling Lilian's soft, slender hand glide silently into mine as I told my tale in the twilight.

All at once, just as I reached the climax, we heard the poodle barking furiously at the hedge which separated my garden from the road.

"There 's a foreign-looking man staring over the hedge," said Lilian; "Bingo always *did* hate foreigners."

There certainly was a swarthy man there, and, though I had no reason for it then, somehow my heart died within me at the sight of him.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," cried the colonel; "the dog won't bite you—unless there 's a hole in the hedge anywhere."

The stranger took off his small straw hat with a sweep. "Ah, I am not afraid," he said, and his accent proclaimed him a Frenchman; "he is not enrage at me. May I ask, is it pairmeet to speak viz Misterre Vezzered?"

I felt I must deal with this person alone, for I feared the worst; and, asking them to excuse me, I went to the hedge and faced the Frenchman with the frightful calm of despair. He was a short, stout little man, with blue cheeks, sparkling black eyes, and a vivacious walnut-coloured countenance; he wore a short black alpaca coat, and a large white cravat, with an immense oval malachite brooch in the centre of it, which I mention because I found myself staring mechanically at it during the interview.

"My name is Weatherhead," I began, with the bearing of a detected pickpocket. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"Of a great service," he said, emphatically; "you can restore to me ze poodle vich I see zere!"

Nemesis had called at last in the shape of a rival claimant. I staggered for an instant; then I said, "Oh, I think you are under a mistake; that dog is not mine."

"I know it," he said; "zere 'as been leetle mistake, so if ze dog is not to you, you give him back to me, *hein?*"

"I tell you," I said, "that poodle belongs to the gentleman over there." And I pointed to the colonel, seeing that it was best now to bring him into the affair without delay.

"You are wrong," he said, doggedly; "ze poodle is my poodle! And I was direct to you—it is your name on ze carte!" And he presented me with that fatal card which I had been foolish enough to give to Blagg as a proof of my identity. I saw it all now; the old villain had betrayed me, and to earn a double reward had put the real owner on my track.

I decided to call the colonel at once, and attempt to brazen it out with the help of his sincere belief in the dog.

"Eh, what 's that; what 's it all about?" said the colonel, bustling up, followed at intervals by the others.

The Frenchman raised his hat again. "I do not vant to make a trouble," he began, "but zere is leetle mistake. My word of honour, sare, I

see my own poodle in your garden. Ven I appeal to zis gentilman to restore 'im he reffer me to you."

"You must allow me to know my own dog, sir," said the colonel. "Why, I 've had him from a pup. Bingo, old boy, you know your master, don't you?"

But the brute ignored him altogether, and began to leap wildly at the hedge in frantic efforts to join the Frenchman. It needed no Solomon to decide *his* ownership!

"I tell you, you 'ave got ze wrong poodle—it is my own dog, my Azor! He remember me well, you see? I lose him, it is three, four days. . . . I see a nottice zat he is found, and ven I go to ze address zey tell me, 'Oh, he is reclaim, he is gone viz a strangaire who has advertise.' Zey show me ze placard; I follow 'ere, and ven I arrive I see my poodle in ze garden before me!"

"But look here," said the colonel, impatiently; "it's all very well to say that, but how can you prove it? I give you *my* word that the dog belongs to *me*! You must prove your claim, eh, Travers?"

"Yes," said Travers, judicially; "mere assertion is no proof; it's oath against oath at present."

"Attend an instant; your poodle, was he 'ighly train, had he some talents—a dog viz tricks, eh?"

"No, he's not," said the colonel; "I don't like

to see dogs taught to play the fool; there 's none of that nonsense about *him*, sir!"

"Ah, remark him well, then. *Azor, mon chou, danse donc un peu!*"

And, on the foreigner's whistling a lively air, that infernal poodle rose on his hind legs and danced solemnly about half-way round the garden! We inside followed his movements with dismay.

"Why, dash it all!" cried the disgusted colonel, "he 's dancing along like a d—d mountebank! But it 's my Bingo, for all that!"

"You are not convince? You shall see more. *Azor, ici! Pour Beesmarck, Azor!*" (The poodle barked ferociously.) "*Pour Gambetta!*" (He wagged his tail and began to leap with joy.) "*Meurs pour la patrie!*" And the too accomplished animal rolled over as if killed in battle!

"Where could Bingo have picked up so much French?" cried Lilian, incredulously.

"Or so much French history?" added that serpent, Travers.

"Shall I command 'im to jomp, or reverse 'imself?" inquired the obliging Frenchman.

"We 've seen that, thank you," said the colonel, gloomily. "Upon my word, I don't know what to think. It can't be that that 's not my Bingo after all—I 'll never believe it!"

I tried a last desperate stroke. "Will you come round to the front?" I said to the Frenchman. "I 'll let you in, and we can discuss the matter

quietly." Then, as we walked back together, I asked him eagerly what he would take to abandon his claims and let the colonel think the poodle was his after all.

He was furious—he considered himself insulted ; with great emotion he informed me that the dog was the pride of his life (it seems to be the mission of black poodles to serve as domestic comforts of this priceless kind!), that he would not part with him for twice his weight in gold.

"Figure," he began, as we joined the others, "zat zis gentilman 'ere 'as offer me money for ze dog! He agrees zat it is to me, you see? Ver' well, zen, zere is no more to be said!"

"Why, Weatherhead, have *you* lost faith too, then?" said the colonel.

I saw that it was no good; all I wanted now was to get out of it creditably and get rid of the Frenchman. "I 'm sorry to say," I replied, "that I 'm afraid I 've been deceived by the extraordinary likeness. I don't think, on reflection, that that *is* Bingo!"

"What do you think, Travers?" asked the colonel.

"Well, since you ask me," said Travers, with quite unnecessary dryness, "I never did think so."

"Nor I," said the colonel; "I thought from the first that was never my Bingo. Why, Bingo would make two of that beast!"

And Lilian and her aunt both protested that they had had their doubts from the first.

"Zen you pairmeet zat I remove 'im?" said the Frenchman.

"Certainly," said the colonel; and, after some apologies on our part for the mistake, he went off in triumph, with the detestable poodle frisking after him.

When he had gone the colonel laid his hand kindly on my shoulder. "Don't look so cut up about it, my boy," he said; "you did your best—there was a sort of likeness to any one who did n't know Bingo as we did."

Just then the Frenchman again appeared at the hedge. "A thousand pardons," he said, "but I find zis upon my dog; it is not to me. Suffer me to restore it viz many compliments."

It was Bingo's collar. Travers took it from his hand and brought it to us.

"This was on the dog when you stopped that fellow, did n't you say?" he asked me.

One more lie—and I was so weary of falsehood! "Y-yes," I said, reluctantly; "that was so."

"Very extraordinary," said Travers; "that 's the wrong poodle beyond a doubt, but when he 's found he 's wearing the right dog's collar! Now how do you account for that?"

"My good fellow," I said, impatiently, "I 'm not in the witness-box. I *can't* account for it. It—it 's a mere coincidence!"

"But look here, my *dear* Weatherhead," argued Travers (whether in good faith or not I never could quite make out), "don't you see what a tre-



mendously important link it is? Here 's a dog who (as I understand the facts) had a silver collar, with his name engraved on it, round his neck at the time he was lost. Here 's that identical collar turning up soon afterward round the neck of a totally different dog! We must follow this up; we must get at the bottom of it somehow! With a clue like this, we 're sure to find out either the dog himself, or what 's become of him! Just try to recollect exactly what happened, there 's a good fellow. This is just the sort of thing I like!"

It was the sort of thing I did not enjoy at all. "You must excuse me to-night, Travers," I said, uncomfortably; "you see, just now it 's rather a sore subject for me, and I 'm not feeling very well!" I was grateful just then for a reassuring glance of pity and confidence from Lilian's sweet eyes, which revived my drooping spirits for the moment.

"Yes, we 'll go into it to-morrow, Travers," said the colonel; "and then—hullo, why, there 's that confounded Frenchman *again*!"

It was indeed; he came prancing back delicately, with a malicious enjoyment on his wrinkled face. "Once more I return to apologise," he said. "My poodle 'as permit 'imself ze grave indiscretion to make a very big 'ole at ze bottom of ze garden!"

I assured him that it was of no consequence. "Perhaps," he replied, looking steadily at me through his keen, half-shut eyes, "you vill not say zat ven you regard ze 'ole. And you others, I spik

to you : sometimes von loses a somzing vich is qvite near all ze time. It is ver' droll, eh? my vord, ha, ha, ha!" And he ambled off, with an aggressively fiendish laugh that chilled my blood.

"What the deuce did he mean by that, eh?" said the colonel, blankly.

"Don't know," said Travers; "suppose we go and inspect the hole?"

But before that I had contrived to draw near it myself, in deadly fear lest the Frenchman's last words had contained some innuendo which I had not understood.

It was light enough still for me to see something, at the unexpected horror of which I very nearly fainted.

That thrice accursed poodle which I had been insane enough to attempt to foist upon the colonel must, it seems, have buried his supper the night before very near the spot in which I had laid Bingo, and in his attempts to exhume his bone had brought the remains of my victim to the surface!

There the corpse lay, on the very top of the excavations. Time had not, of course, improved its appearance, which was ghastly in the extreme, but still plainly recognisable by the eye of affection.

"It's a very ordinary hole," I gasped, putting myself before it and trying to turn them back. "Nothing in it—nothing at all!"

"Except one Algernon Weatherhead, Esq., eh?" whispered Travers, jocosely, in my ear.

"No; but," persisted the colonel, advancing, "look here! Has the dog damaged any of your shrubs?"

"No, no!" I cried, piteously; "quite the reverse. Let's all go indoors now; it's getting so cold!"

"See, there *is* a shrub or something uprooted," said the colonel, still coming nearer that fatal hole. "Why, hullo, look there! What's that?"

Lilian, who was by his side, gave a slight scream. "Uncle," she cried, "it looks like—like *Bingo*!"

The colonel turned suddenly upon me. "Do you hear?" he demanded, in a choked voice. "You hear what she says? Can't you speak out? Is that our *Bingo*?"

I gave it up at last; I only longed to be allowed to crawl away under something! "Yes," I said, in a dull whisper, as I sat down heavily on a garden seat, "yes . . . that's *Bingo* . . . misfortune . . . shoot him . . . quite an accident!"

There was a terrible explosion after that; they saw at last how I had deceived them, and put the very worst construction upon everything. Even now I writhe impotently at times, and my cheeks smart and tingle with humiliation, as I recall that scene—the colonel's very plain speaking, Lilian's passionate reproaches and contempt, and her aunt's speechless prostration of disappointment.

I made no attempt to defend myself; I was not, perhaps, the complete villain they deemed me, but I felt dully that no doubt it all served me perfectly right.

Still I do not think I am under any obligation to put their remarks down in black and white here.

Travers had vanished at the first opportunity—whether out of delicacy, or the fear of breaking out into unseasonable mirth, I cannot say; and shortly afterward the others came to where I sat silent with bowed head, and bade me a stern and final farewell.

And then, as the last gleam of Lilian's white dress vanished down the garden path, I laid my head down on the table among the coffee-cups, and cried like a beaten child.

I got leave as soon as I could, and went abroad. The morning after my return I noticed, while shaving, that there was a small square marble tablet placed against the wall of the colonel's garden. I got my opera-glass and read—and pleasant reading it was—the following inscription:

IN AFFECTIONATE MEMORY  
OF  
BINGO,  
SECRETLY AND CRUELLY PUT TO DEATH,  
IN COLD BLOOD,  
BY A  
NEIGHBOUR AND FRIEND.  
JUNE, 1881.

If this explanation of mine ever reaches my neighbours' eyes, I humbly hope they will have the humanity either to take away or tone down

that tablet. They cannot conceive what I suffer when curious visitors insist, as they do every day, on spelling out the words from our windows, and asking me countless questions about them!

Sometimes I meet the Curries about the village, and as they pass me with averted heads I feel myself growing crimson. Travers is almost always with Lilian now. He has given her a dog,—a fox-terrier,—and they take ostentatiously elaborate precautions to keep it out of my garden.

I should like to assure them here that they need not be under any alarm. I have shot one dog.

# THAT BRUTE SIMMONS

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON



## THAT BRUTE SIMMONS

BY ARTHUR MORRISON

SIMMONS'S infamous behaviour toward his wife is still matter for profound wonderment among the neighbours. The other women had all along regarded him as a model husband, and certainly Mrs. Simmons was a most conscientious wife. She toiled and slaved for that man, as any woman in the whole street would have maintained, far more than any husband had a right to expect. And now this was what she got for it. Perhaps he had suddenly gone mad.

Before she married Simmons, Mrs. Simmons had been the widowed Mrs. Ford. Ford had got a berth as donkeyman on a tramp steamer, and that steamer had gone down with all hands off the Cape: a judgment, the widow woman feared, for long years of contumacy, which had culminated in the wickedness of taking to the sea, and taking to it as a donkeyman—an immeasurable fall for a capable engine-fitter. Twelve years as Mrs. Ford had left her still childless, and childless she remained as Mrs. Simmons.

As for Simmons, he, it was held, was fortunate in that capable wife. He was a moderately good



carpenter and joiner, but no man of the world, and he wanted one. Nobody could tell what might not have happened to Tommy Simmons if there had been no Mrs. Simmons to take care of him. He was a meek and quiet man, with a boyish face and sparse, limp whiskers. He had no vices (even his pipe departed him after his marriage), and Mrs. Simmons had ingrafted on him divers exotic virtues. He went solemnly to chapel every Sunday, under a tall hat, and put a penny—one returned to him for the purpose out of his week's wages—in the plate. Then, Mrs. Simmons overseeing, he took off his best clothes, and brushed them with solicitude and pains. On Saturday afternoons he cleaned the knives, the forks, the boots, the kettles, and the windows, patiently and conscientiously; on Tuesday evenings he took the clothes to the mangling; and on Saturday nights he attended Mrs. Simmons in her marketing, to carry the parcels.

Mrs. Simmons's own virtues were native and numerous. She was a wonderful manager. Every penny of Tommy's thirty-six or thirty-eight shillings a week was bestowed to the greatest advantage, and Tommy never ventured to guess how much of it she saved. Her cleanliness in housewifery was distracting to behold. She met Simmons at the front door whenever he came home, and then and there he changed his boots for slippers, balancing himself painfully on alternate feet on the cold flags. This was because she scrubbed the passage and door-step turn about with the wife of the down-

stairs family, and because the stair-carpet was her own. She vigilantly supervised her husband all through the process of "cleaning himself" after work, so as to come between her walls and the possibility of random splashes; and if, in spite of her diligence, a spot remained to tell the tale, she was at pains to impress the fact on Simmons's memory, and to set forth at length all the circumstances of his ungrateful selfishness. In the beginning she had always escorted him to the ready-made clothes shop, and had selected and paid for his clothes, for the reason that men are such perfect fools, and shopkeepers do as they like with them. But she presently improved on that. She found a man selling cheap remnants at a street-corner, and straightway she conceived the idea of making Simmons's clothes herself. Decision was one of her virtues, and a suit of uproarious check tweeds was begun that afternoon from the pattern furnished by an old one. More: it was finished by Sunday, when Simmons, overcome by astonishment at the feat, was endued in it, and pushed off to chapel ere he could recover his senses. The things were not altogether comfortable, he found: the trousers clung tight against his shins, but hung loose behind his heels; and when he sat, it was on a wilderness of hard folds and seams. Also, his waistcoat collar tickled his nape, but his coat collar went straining across from shoulder to shoulder; while the main garment bagged generously below his waist. Use made a habit of his discomfort,

but it never reconciled him to the chaff of his shopmates; for, as Mrs. Simmons elaborated successive suits, each one modelled on the last, the primal accidents of her design developed into principles, and grew even bolder and more hideously pronounced. It was vain for Simmons to hint—as hint he did—that he should n't like her to overwork herself, tailoring being bad for the eyes, and there was a new tailor's in the Mile End Road, very cheap, where . . . “Ho yus,” she retorted, “you 're very consid'rit I dessay sittin' there actin' a livin' lie before your own wife Thomas Simmons as though I could n't see through you like a book a lot you care about overworkin' me as long as *your* turn 's served throwin' away money like dirt in the street on a lot o' swindlin' tailors an' me workin' an' slavin' 'ere to save a 'a'penny an' this is my return for it any one 'ud think you could pick up money in the 'orse-road an' I b'lieve I 'd be thought better of if I laid in bed all day like some would that I do.” So that Thomas Simmons avoided the subject, nor even murmured when she resolved to cut his hair.

So his placid fortune endured for years. Then there came a golden summer evening when Mrs. Simmons betook herself with a basket to do some small shopping, and Simmons was left at home. He washed and put away the tea-things, and then he fell to meditating on a new pair of trousers, finished that day, and hanging behind the parlour door. There they hung, in all their decent inno-

cence of shape in the seat, and they were shorter of leg, longer of waist, and wilder of pattern than he had ever worn before. And as he looked on them the small devil of Original Sin awoke and clamoured in his breast. He was ashamed of it, of course, for well he knew the gratitude he owed his wife for those same trousers, among other blessings. Still, there the small devil was, and the small devil was fertile in base suggestions, and could not be kept from hinting at the new crop of workshop gibes that would spring at Tommy's first public appearance in such things.

"Pitch 'em in the dust-bin!" said the small devil at last. "It 's all they 're fit for."

Simmons turned away in sheer horror of his wicked self, and for a moment thought of washing the tea-things over again by way of discipline. Then he made for the back room, but saw from the landing that the front door was standing open, probably by the fault of the child downstairs. Now a front door standing open was a thing that Mrs. Simmons would *not* abide: it looked low. So Simmons went down, that she might not be wroth with him for the thing when she came back; and, as he shut the door, he looked forth into the street.

A man was loitering on the pavement, and prying curiously about the door. His face was tanned, his hands were deep in the pockets of his unbraced blue trousers, and well back on his head he wore the high-crowned peaked cap, topped with a knob of wool, which is affected by Jack ashore about

the docks. He lurched a step nearer to the door, and "Mrs. Ford ain't in, is she?" he said.

Simmons stared at him for a matter of five seconds, and then said, "Eh?"

"Mrs. Ford as was, then—Simmons now, ain't it?"

He said this with a furtive leer that Simmons neither liked nor understood.

"No," said Simmons; "she ain't in now."

"You ain't her 'usband, are ye?"

"Yus."

The man took his pipe from his mouth and grinned silently and long. "Blimy," he said at length, "you look the sort o' bloke she 'd like," and with that he grinned again. Then, seeing that Simmons made ready to shut the door, he put a foot on the sill and a hand against the panel. "Don't be in a 'urry, matey," he said; "I come 'ere t' 'ave a little talk with you, man to man, d' ye see?" And he frowned fiercely.

Tommy Simmons felt uncomfortable, but the door would not shut, so he parleyed. "Wotjer want?" he asked. "I dunno you."

"Then, if you 'll excuse the liberty, I 'll inter-dooce meself, in a manner of speaking." He touched his cap with a bob of mock humility. "I 'm Bob Ford," he said, "come back out o' kingdom come, so to say. Me as went down with the *Mooltan*—safe dead five year gone. I come to see my wife."

During this speech Thomas Simmons's jaw was

dropping lower and lower. At the end of it he poked his fingers up through his hair, looked down at the mat, then up at the fanlight, then out into the street, then hard at his visitor. But he found nothing to say.

"Come to see my wife," the man repeated. "So now we can talk it over—as man to man."

Simmons slowly shut his mouth, and led the way upstairs mechanically, his fingers still in his hair. A sense of the state of affairs sank gradually into his brain, and the small devil woke again. Suppose this man *was* Ford? Suppose he *did* claim his wife? Would it be a knock-down blow? Would it hit him out?—or not? He thought of the trousers, the tea-things, the mangling, the knives, the kettles, and the windows; and he thought of them in the way of a backslider.

On the landing Ford clutched at his arm, and asked in a hoarse whisper, "'Ow long 'fore she's back?"

"'Bout a hour, I expect," Simmons replied, having first of all repeated the question in his own mind. And then he opened the parlour door.

"Ah," said Ford, looking about him, "you 've bin pretty comf'table. Them chairs an' things," jerking his pipe toward them, "was hers—mine, that is to say, speakin' straight, and man to man." He sat down, puffing meditatively at his pipe, and presently, "Well," he continued, "'ere I am agin, ol' Bob Ford, dead an' done for—gone down in the *Mooltan*. On'y I *ain't* done for, see?" And

he pointed the stem of his pipe at Simmons's waist-coat. "I ain't done for, 'cause why? Cons'kence o' bein' picked up by a ol' German sailin'-'utch an' took to 'Frisco 'fore the mast. I've 'ad a few years o' knockin' about since then, an' now"—looking hard at Simmons—"I've come back to see my wife."

"She—she don't like smoke in 'ere," said Simmons, as it were at random.

"No, I bet she don't," Ford answered, taking his pipe from his mouth and holding it low in his hand. "I know 'Anner. 'Ow d' you find 'er? Do she make ye clean the winders?"

"Well," Simmons admitted, uneasily, "I—I do 'elp 'er sometimes, o' course."

"Ah! An' the knives too, I bet, an' the bloom-in' kittles. I know. W'y"—he rose and bent to look behind Simmons's head—"s' 'elp me, I b'lieve she cuts yer 'air! Well, I 'm damned! Jes' wot she would do, too."

He inspected the blushing Simmons from divers points of vantage. Then he lifted a leg of the trousers hanging behind the door. "I'd bet a trifle," he said, "she made these 'ere trucks. Nobody else 'ud do 'em like that. Damme! they 're wuss 'n wot you 're got on."

The small devil began to have the argument all its own way. If this man took his wife back perhaps he 'd have to wear those trousers.

"Ah," Ford pursued, "she ain't got no milder. An', my davy, wot a jore!"

Simmons began to feel that this was no longer his business. Plainly, 'Anner was this other man's wife, and he was bound in honour to acknowledge the fact. The small devil put it to him as a matter of duty.

"Well," said Ford, suddenly, "time 's short an' this ain't business. I won't be 'ard on you, matey. I ought prop'ly to stand on my rights, but seein' as you 're a well-meanin' young man, so to speak, an' all settled an' a-livin' 'ere quiet an' matrimonial, I 'll"—this with a burst of generosity—"damme! yus, I 'll compound the felony an' take me 'ook. Come, I 'll name a figure, as man to man, fust an' last, no less an' no more. Five pound does it."

Simmons had n't five pounds,—he had n't even fivepence,—and he said so. "An' I would n't think for to come between a man an' 'is wife," he added, "not on no account. It may be rough on me, but it 's a dooty. I 'll 'ook it."

"No," said Ford, hastily, clutching Simmons by the arm, "don't do that. I 'll make it a bit cheaper. Say three quid—come, that 's reasonable, ain't it? Three quid ain't much compensation for me goin' away for ever—where the stormy winds do blow, so to say—an' never as much as seein' me own wife agin for better nor wuss. Between man an' man, now, three quid, an' I 'll shunt. That 's fair, ain't it?"

"Of course it's fair," Simmons replied, effusively. "It 's more 'n fair: it 's noble—downright noble, I call it. But I ain't goin' to take a mean advan-



tage o' your good-'artedness, Mr. Ford. She 's your wife, an' I ought n't to 'a' come between you. I apologise. You stop an' 'ave yer proper rights. It 's me as ought to shunt, an' I will." And he made a step toward the door.

"'Old on," quoth Ford, and got between Simmons and the door; "don't do things rash. Look wot a loss it 'll be to you with no 'ome to go to, an' nobody to look after ye, an' all that. It 'll be dreadful. Say a couple—there, we won't quarrel, jest a single quid, between man an' man, an' I 'll stand a pot out o' the money. You can easy raise a quid—the clock 'ud pretty nigh do it. A quid does it, an' I 'll—"

There was a loud double knock at the front door. In the East End a double knock is always for the upstairs lodgers.

"Oq 's that?" asked Bob Ford, apprehensively.

"I 'll see," said Thomas Simmons, in reply, and he made a rush for the staircase.

Bob Ford heard him open the front door. Then he went to the window, and just below him he saw the crown of a bonnet. It vanished, and borne to him from within the door there fell upon his ear the sound of a well-remembered female voice.

"Where ye goin' now with no 'at?" asked the voice, sharply.

"Awright, 'Anner—there 's—there 's somebody upstairs to see you," Simmons answered. And, as Bob Ford could see, a man went scuttling down

the street in the gathering dusk. And behold, it was Thomas Simmons.

Ford reached the landing in three strides. His wife was still at the front door, staring after Simmons. He flung into the back room, threw open the window, dropped from the wash-house roof into the back yard, scrambled desperately over the fence, and disappeared into the gloom. He was seen by no living soul. And that is why Simmons's base desertion—under his wife's very eyes, too—is still an astonishment to the neighbours.



# **A ROSE OF THE GHETTO**

**BY**

**ISRAEL ZANGWILL**



## A ROSE OF THE GHETTO

BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

ONE day it occurred to Leibel that he ought to get married. He went to Sugarman the Shadchan forthwith.

"I have the very thing for you," said the great marriage broker.

"Is she pretty?" asked Leibel.

"Her father has a boot and shoe warehouse," replied Sugarman, enthusiastically.

"Then there ought to be a dowry with her," said Leibel, eagerly.

"Certainly a dowry! A fine man like you!"

"How much do you think it would be?"

"Of course it is not a large warehouse; but then you could get your boots at trade price, and your wife's, perhaps, for the cost of the leather."

"When could I see her?"

"I will arrange for you to call next Sabbath afternoon."

"You won't charge me more than a sovereign?"

"Not a groschen more! Such a pious maiden! I'm sure you will be happy. She has so much way-of-the-country [breeding]. And of course five per cent. on the dowry?"

"H'm! Well, I don't mind!" "Perhaps they won't give a dowry," he thought, with a consolatory sense of outwitting the Shadchan.

On the Saturday Leibel went to see the damsel, and on the Sunday he went to see Sugarman the Shadchan.

"But your maiden squints!" he cried, resentfully.

"An excellent thing!" said Sugarman. "A wife who squints can never look her husband straight in the face and overwhelm him. Who would quail before a woman with a squint?"

"I could endure the squint," went on Leibel, dubiously, "but she also stammers."

"Well, what is better, in the event of a quarrel? The difficulty she has in talking will keep her far more silent than most wives. You had best secure her while you have the chance."

"But she halts on the left leg," cried Leibel, exasperated.

"*Gott in Himmel!* Do you mean to say you do not see what an advantage it is to have a wife unable to accompany you in all your goings?"

Leibel lost patience.

"Why, the girl is a hunchback!" he protested, furiously.

"My dear Leibel," said the marriage broker, deprecatingly shrugging his shoulders and spreading out his palms, "you can't expect perfection!"

Nevertheless Leibel persisted in his unreasonable attitude. He accused Sugarman of wasting his time, of making a fool of him.

"A fool of you!" echoed the Shadchan, indignantly, "when I give you a chance of a boot and shoe manufacturer's daughter? You will make a fool of yourself if you refuse. I dare say her dowry would be enough to set you up as a master tailor. At present you are compelled to slave away as a cutter for thirty shillings a week. It is most unjust. If you only had a few machines you would be able to employ your own cutters. And they can be got so cheap nowadays."

This gave Leibel pause, and he departed without having definitely broken the negotiations. His whole week was befogged by doubt, his work became uncertain, his chalk marks lacked their usual decision, and he did not always cut his coat according to his cloth. His aberrations became so marked that pretty Rose Green, the sweater's eldest daughter, who managed a machine in the same room, divined, with all a woman's intuition, that he was in love.

"What is the matter?" she said, in rallying Yiddish, when they were taking their lunch of bread and cheese and ginger-beer amid the clatter of machines, whose serfs had not yet knocked off work.

"They are proposing me a match," he answered, sullenly.

"A match!" ejaculated Rose. "Thou!" She had worked by his side for years, and familiarity bred the second person singular. Leibel nodded his head, and put a mouthful of Dutch cheese into it.



"With whom?" asked Rose. Somehow he felt ashamed. He gurgled the answer into the stone ginger-beer bottle, which he put to his thirsty lips.

"With Leah Volcovitch!"

"Leah Volcovitch!" gasped Rose. "Leah, the boot and shoe manufacturer's daughter?"

Leibel hung his head—he scarce knew why. He did not dare meet her gaze. His droop said "Yes." There was a long pause.

"And why dost thou not have her?" said Rose. It was more than an inquiry; there was contempt in it, and perhaps even pique.

Leibel did not reply. The embarrassing silence reigned again, and reigned long. Rose broke it at last.

"Is it that thou likest me better?" she asked.

Leibel seemed to see a ball of lightning in the air; it burst, and he felt the electric current strike right through his heart. The shock threw his head up with a jerk, so that his eyes gazed into a face whose beauty and tenderness were revealed to him for the first time. The face of his old acquaintance had vanished; this was a cajoling, coquettish, smiling face, suggesting undreamed-of things.

"Nu, yes," he replied, without perceptible pause.

"Nu, good!" she rejoined as quickly.

And in the ecstasy of that moment of mutual understanding Leibel forgot to wonder why he had never thought of Rose before. Afterward he remembered that she had always been his social superior.

The situation seemed too dream-like for explanation to the room just yet. Leibel lovingly passed the bottle of ginger-beer, and Rose took a sip, with a beautiful air of plighting troth, understood only of those two. When Leibel quaffed the remnant it intoxicated him. The relics of the bread and cheese were the ambrosia to this nectar. They did not dare kiss; the suddenness of it all left them bashful, and the smack of lips would have been like a cannon-peal announcing their engagement. There was a subtler sweetness in this sense of a secret, apart from the fact that neither cared to break the news to the master tailor, a stern little old man. Leibel's chalk marks continued indecisive that afternoon, which shows how correctly Rose had connected them with love.

Before he left that night Rose said to him, "Art thou sure thou wouldst not rather have Leah Volcovitch?"

"Not for all the boots and shoes in the world," replied Leibel, vehemently.

"And I," protested Rose, "would rather go without my own than without thee."

The landing outside the workshop was so badly lighted that their lips came together in the darkness.

"Nay, nay; thou must not yet," said Rose. "Thou art still courting Leah Volcovitch. For aught thou knowest, Sugarman the Shadchan may have entangled thee beyond redemption."

"Not so," asserted Leibel. "I have only seen the maiden once."

"Yes. But Sugarman has seen her father several times," persisted Rose. "For so misshapen a maiden his commission would be large. Thou must go to Sugarman to-night, and tell him that thou canst not find it in thy heart to go on with the match."

"Kiss me, and I will go," pleaded Leibel.

"Go, and I will kiss thee," said Rose, resolutely.

"And when shall we tell thy father?" he asked, pressing her hand, as the next best thing to her lips.

"As soon as thou art free from Leah."

"But will he consent?"

"He will not be glad," said Rose, frankly. "But after mother's death—peace be upon her—the rule passed from her hands into mine."

"Ah, that is well," said Leibel. He was a superficial thinker.

Leibel found Sugarman at supper. The great Shadchan offered him a chair, but nothing else. Hospitality was associated in his mind with special occasions only, and involved lemonade and "stuffed monkeys."

He was very put out—almost to the point of indigestion—to hear of Leibel's final determination, and plied him with reproachful inquiries.

"You don't mean to say that you give up a boot and shoe manufacturer merely because his daughter has round shoulders!" he exclaimed, incredulously.

"It is more than round shoulders—it is a hump!" cried Leibel.

"And suppose? See how much better off you will be when you get your own machines! We do not refuse to let camels carry our burdens because they have humps."

"Ah, but a wife is not a camel," said Leibel, with a sage air.

"And a cutter is not a master tailor," retorted Sugarman.

"Enough, enough!" cried Leibel. "I tell you, I would not have her if she were a machine warehouse."

"There sticks something behind," persisted Sugarman, unconvinced.

Leibel shook his head. "Only her hump," he said, with a flash of humour.

"Moses Mendelssohn had a hump," expostulated Sugarman, reproachfully.

"Yes, but he was a heretic," rejoined Leibel, who was not without reading. "And then he was a man! A man with two humps could find a wife for each. But a woman with a hump cannot expect a husband in addition."

"Guard your tongue from evil," quoth the Shadchan, angrily. "If everybody were to talk like you Leah Volcovitch would never be married at all."

Leibel shrugged his shoulders, and reminded him that hunchbacked girls who stammered and squinted and halted on left legs were not usually led under the canopy.

"Nonsense! Stuff!" cried Sugarman, angrily. "That is because they do not come to me."

"Leah Volcovitch *has* come to you," said Leibel, "but she shall not come to me." And he rose, anxious to escape.

Instantly Sugarman gave a sigh of resignation. "Be it so! Then I shall have to look out for another, that 's all."

"No, I don't want any," replied Leibel, quickly.

Sugarman stopped eating. "You don't want any?" he cried. "But you came to me for one?"

"I—I—know," stammered Leibel. "But I 've—I 've altered my mind."

"One needs Hillel's patience to deal with you!" cried Sugarman. "But I shall charge you, all the same, for my trouble. You cannot cancel an order like this in the middle! No, no! You can play fast and loose with Leah Volcovitch, but you shall not make a fool of me."

"But if I don't want one?" said Leibel, sullenly.

Sugarman gazed at him with a cunning look of suspicion. "Did n't I say there was something sticking behind?"

Leibel felt guilty. "But whom have you got in your eye?" he inquired, desperately.

"Perhaps you may have some one in yours!" naïvely answered Sugarman.

Leibel gave a hypocritic long-drawn "U-m-m-m! I wonder if Rose Green—where I work—" he said, and stopped.

"I fear not," said Sugarman. "She is on my list. Her father gave her to me some months

ago, but he is hard to please. Even the maiden herself is not easy, being pretty."

"Perhaps she has waited for some one," suggested Leibel.

Sugarman's keen ear caught the note of complacent triumph.

"You have been asking her yourself!" he exclaimed, in horror-stricken accents.

"And if I have?" said Leibel, defiantly.

"You have cheated me! And so has Eliphaz Green—I always knew he was tricky! You have both defrauded me!"

"I did not mean to," said Leibel, mildly.

"You *did* mean to. You had no business to take the matter out of my hands. What right had you to propose to Rose Green?"

"I did not," cried Leibel, excitedly.

"Then you asked her father!"

"No; I have not asked her father yet."

"Then how do you know she will have you?"

"I—I know," stammered Leibel, feeling himself somehow a liar as well as a thief. His brain was in a whirl; he could not remember how the thing had come about. Certainly he had not proposed; nor could he say that she had.

"You know she will have you," repeated Sugarman, reflectively. "And does *she* know?"

"Yes. In fact," he blurted out, "we arranged it together."

"Ah, you both know. And does her father know?"

"Not yet."

"Ah, then I must get his consent," said Sugarman, decisively.

"I—I thought of speaking to him myself."

"Yourself!" echoed Sugarman, in horror. "Are you unsound in the head? Why, that would be worse than the mistake you have already made!"

"What mistake?" asked Leibel, firing up.

"The mistake of asking the maiden herself. When you quarrel with her after your marriage she will always throw it in your teeth that you wished to marry her. Moreover, if you tell a maiden you love her, her father will think you ought to marry her as she stands. Still, what is done is done." And he sighed regretfully.

"And what more do I want? I love her."

"You piece of clay!" cried Sugarman, contemptuously. "Love will not turn machines, much less buy them. You must have a dowry. Her father has a big stocking; he can well afford it."

Leibel's eyes lit up. There was really no reason why he should not have bread and cheese with his kisses.

"Now, if *you* went to her father," pursued the Shadchan, "the odds are that he would not even give you his daughter—to say nothing of the dowry. After all, it is a cheek of you to aspire so high. As you told me from the first, you have n't saved a penny. Even my commission you won't be able to pay till you get the dowry. But if *I* go

I do not despair of getting a substantial sum—to say nothing of the daughter.”

“Yes, I think you had better go,” said Leibel, eagerly.

“But if I do this thing for you I shall want a pound more,” rejoined Sugarman.

“A pound more!” echoed Leibel, in dismay. “Why?”

“Because Rose Green’s hump is of gold,” replied Sugarman, oracularly. “Also, she is fair to see, and many men desire her.”

“But you have always your five per cent. on the dowry.”

“It will be less than Volcovitch’s,” explained Sugarman. “You see, Green has other and less beautiful daughters.”

“Yes, but then it settles itself more easily. Say five shillings.”

“Eliphaz Green is a hard man,” said the Shadchan instead.

“Ten shillings is the most I will give!”

“Twelve and sixpence is the least I will take. Eliphaz Green haggles so terribly.”

They split the difference, and so eleven and threepence represented the predominance of Eliphaz Green’s stinginess over Volcovitch’s.

The very next day Sugarman invaded the Green workroom. Rose bent over her seams, her heart fluttering. Leibel had duly apprised her of the roundabout manner in which she would have to be won, and she had acquiesced in the comedy.



At the least it would save her the trouble of father-taming.

Sugarman's entry was brusque and breathless. He was overwhelmed with joyous emotion. His blue bandana trailed agitatedly from his coat-tail.

"At last!" he cried, addressing the little white-haired master tailor; "I have the very man for you."

"Yes?" grunted Eliphaz, unimpressed. The monosyllable was packed with emotion. It said, "Have you really the face to come to me again with an ideal man?"

"He has all the qualities that you desire," began the Shadchan, in a tone that repudiated the implications of the monosyllable. "He is young, strong, God-fearing—"

"Has he any money?" grumpily interrupted Eliphaz.

"He *will* have money," replied Sugarman, unhesitatingly, "when he marries."

"Ah!" The father's voice relaxed, and his foot lay limp on the treadle. He worked one of his machines himself, and paid himself the wages so as to enjoy the profit. "How much will he have?"

"I think he will have fifty pounds; and the least you can do is to let him have fifty pounds," replied Sugarman, with the same happy ambiguity.

Eliphaz shook his head on principle.

"Yes, you will," said Sugarman, "when you learn how fine a man he is."

The flush of confusion and trepidation already

on Leibel's countenance became a rosy glow of modesty, for he could not help overhearing what was being said, owing to the lull of the master tailor's machine.

"Tell me, then," rejoined Eliphaz.

"Tell me, first, if you will give fifty to a young, healthy, hard-working, God-fearing man, whose idea it is to start as a master tailor on his own account? And you know how profitable that is!"

"To a man like that," said Eliphaz, in a burst of enthusiasm, "I would give as much as twenty-seven pounds ten!"

Sugarman groaned inwardly, but Leibel's heart leaped with joy. To get four months' wages at a stroke! With twenty-seven pounds ten he could certainly procure several machines, especially on the instalment system. Out of the corners of his eyes he shot a glance at Rose, who was beyond earshot.

"Unless you can promise thirty it is waste of time mentioning his name," said Sugarman.

"Well, well—who is he?"

Sugarman bent down, lowering his voice into the father's ear.

"What! Leibel!" cried Eliphaz, outraged.

"Sh!" said Sugarman, "or he will overhear your delight, and ask more. He has his nose high enough, as it is."

"B—b—b—ut," sputtered the bewildered parent, "I know Leibel myself. I see him every day. I don't want a Shadchan to find me a man I know—a mere hand in my own workshop!"

"Your talk has neither face nor figure," answered Sugarman, sternly. "It is just the people one sees every day that one knows least. I warrant that if I had not put it into your head you would never have dreamt of Leibel as a son-in-law. Come now, confess."

Eliphaz grunted vaguely, and the Shadchan went on triumphantly: "I thought as much. And yet where could you find a better man to keep your daughter?"

"He ought to be content with her alone," grumbled her father.

Sugarman saw the signs of weakening, and dashed in, full strength: "It 's a question whether he will have her at all. I have not been to him about her yet. I awaited your approval of the idea." Leibel admired the verbal accuracy of these statements, which he just caught.

"But I did n't know he would be having money," murmured Eliphaz.

"Of course you did n't know. That 's what the Shadchan is for—to point out the things that are under your nose."

"But where will he be getting this money from?"

"From you," said Sugarman, frankly.

"From me?"

"From whom else? Are you not his employer? It has been put by for his marriage day."

"He has saved it?"

"He has not *spent* it," said Sugarman, impatiently.

"But do you mean to say he has saved fifty pounds?"

"If he could manage to save fifty pounds out of your wages he would be indeed a treasure," said Sugarman. "Perhaps it might be thirty."

"But you said fifty."

"Well, *you* came down to thirty," retorted the Shadchan. "You cannot expect him to have more than your daughter brings."

"I never said thirty," Eliphaz reminded him. "Twenty-seven ten was my last bid."

"Very well; that will do as a basis of negotiations," said Sugarman, resignedly. "I will call upon him this evening. If I were to go over and speak to him now, he would perceive you were anxious, and raise his terms, and that will never do. Of course you will not mind allowing me a pound more for finding you so economical a son-in-law?"

"Not a penny more."

"You need not fear," said Sugarman, resentfully. "It is not likely I shall be able to persuade him to take so economical a father-in-law. So you will be none the worse for promising."

"Be it so," said Eliphaz, with a gesture of weariness, and he started his machine again.

"Twenty-seven pounds ten, remember," said Sugarman, above the whir.

Eliphaz nodded his head, whirring his wheel-work louder.

"And paid before the wedding, mind."

The machine took no notice.

"Before the wedding, mind," repeated Sugarman. "Before we go under the canopy."

"Go now, go now!" grunted Eliphaz, with a gesture of impatience. "It shall be all well." And the white-haired head bowed immovably over its work.

In the evening Rose extracted from her father the motive of Sugarman's visit, and confessed that the idea was to her liking.

"But dost thou think he will have me, little father?" she asked, with cajoling eyes.

"Any one would have my Rose."

"Ah, but Leibel is different. So many years he has sat at my side and said nothing."

"He had his work to think of. He is a good, saving youth."

"At this very moment Sugarman is trying to persuade him—not so? I suppose he will want much money."

"Be easy, my child." And he passed his discoloured hand over her hair.

Sugarman turned up the next day, and reported that Leibel was unobtainable under thirty pounds; and Eliphaz, weary of the contest, called over Leibel, till that moment carefully absorbed in his scientific chalk marks, and mentioned the thing to him for the first time. "I am not a man to bargain," Eliphaz said, and so he gave the young man his tawny hand, and a bottle of rum sprang from somewhere, and work was suspended for five minutes, and the "hands" all drank amid surprised

excitement. Sugarman's visits had prepared them to congratulate Rose ; but Leibel was a shock.

The formal engagement was marked by even greater junketing, and at last the marriage day came. Leibel was resplendent in a diagonal frock-coat, cut by his own hand ; and Rose stepped from the cab a medley of flowers, fairness, and white silk, and behind her came two bridesmaids,—her sisters,—a trio that glorified the spectator-strewn pavement outside the synagogue. Eliphaz looked almost tall in his shiny high hat and frilled shirt-front. Sugarman arrived on foot, carrying red-socked little Ebenezer tucked under his arm.

Leibel and Rose were not the only couple to be disposed of, for it was the thirty-third day of the Omer—a day fruitful in marriages.

But at last their turn came. They did not, however, come in their turn, and their special friends among the audience wondered why they had lost their precedence. After several later marriages had taken place a whisper began to circulate. The rumour of a hitch gained ground steadily, and the sensation was proportionate. And, indeed, the rose was not to be picked without a touch of the thorn.

Gradually the facts leaked out, and a buzz of talk and comment ran through the waiting synagogue. Eliphaz had not paid up!

At first he declared he would put down the money immediately after the ceremony. But the wary Sugarman, schooled by experience, demanded its instant delivery on behalf of his other client.

Hard pressed, Eliphaz produced ten sovereigns from his trousers-pocket, and tendered them on account. These Sugarman disdainfully refused, and the negotiations were suspended. The bridegroom's party was encamped in one room, the bride's in another, and after a painful delay Eliphaz sent an emissary to say that half the amount should be forthcoming, the extra five pounds in a bright new Bank of England note. Leibel, instructed and encouraged by Sugarman, stood firm.

And then arose a hubbub of voices, a chaos of suggestions; friends rushed to and fro between the camps, some emerging from their seats in the synagogue to add to the confusion. But Eliphaz had taken his stand upon a rock—he had no more ready money. To-morrow, the next day, he would have some. And Leibel, pale and dogged, clutched tighter at those machines that were slipping away momentarily from him. He had not yet seen his bride that morning, and so her face was shadowy compared with the tangibility of those machines. Most of the other maidens were married women by now, and the situation was growing desperate. From the female camp came terrible rumours of bridesmaids in hysterics, and a bride that tore her wreath in a passion of shame and humiliation. Eliphaz sent word that he would give an I O U for the balance, but that he really could not muster any more current coin. Sugarman instructed the ambassador to suggest that Eliphaz should raise the money among his friends.

And the short spring day slipped away. In vain the minister, apprised of the block, lengthened out the formulæ for the other pairs, and blessed them with more reposeful unction. It was impossible to stave off the Leibel-Green item indefinitely, and at last Rose remained the only orange-wreathed spinster in the synagogue. And then there was a hush of solemn suspense, that swelled gradually into a steady rumble of babbling tongues, as minute succeeded minute and the final bridal party still failed to appear. The latest bulletin pictured the bride in a dead faint. The afternoon was waning fast. The minister left his post near the canopy, under which so many lives had been united, and came to add his white tie to the forces for compromise. But he fared no better than the others. Incensed at the obstinacy of the antagonists, he declared he would close the synagogue. He gave the couple ten minutes to marry in or quit. Then chaos came, and pandemonium—a frantic babel of suggestion and exhortation from the crowd. When five minutes had passed a legate from Eliphaz announced that his side had scraped together twenty pounds, and that this was their final bid.

Leibel wavered; the long day's combat had told upon him; the reports of the bride's distress had weakened him. Even Sugarman had lost his cocksureness of victory. A few minutes more and both commissions might slip through his fingers. Once the parties left the synagogue, it would not be easy to drive them there another day. But he



cheered on his man still : one could always surrender at the tenth minute.

At the eighth the buzz of tongues faltered suddenly, to be transposed into a new key, so to speak. Through the gesticulating assembly swept that murmur of expectation which crowds know when the procession is coming at last. By some mysterious magnetism all were aware that the BRIDE herself—the poor hysteric bride—had left the paternal camp, was coming in person to plead with her mercenary lover.

And as the glory of her and the flowers and the white draperies loomed upon Leibel's vision his heart melted in worship, and he knew his citadel would crumble in ruins at her first glance, at her first touch. Was it fair fighting? As his troubled vision cleared, and as she came nigh unto him, he saw to his amazement that she was speckless and composed—no trace of tears dimmed the fairness of her face, there was no disarray in her bridal wreath.

The clock showed the ninth minute.

She put her hand appealingly on his arm, while a heavenly light came into her face—the expression of a Joan of Arc animating her country.

“Do not give in, Leibel!” she said. “Do not have me! Do not let them persuade thee! By my life, thou must not! Go home!”

So at the eleventh minute the vanquished Eliphaz produced the balance, and they all lived happily ever afterward.

# AN IDYL OF LONDON

BY  
BEATRICE HARRADEN



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**I**T was one o'clock, and many of the students in the National Gallery had left off work and were refreshing themselves with lunch and conversation. There was one old worker who had not stirred from his place, but he had put down his brush, and had taken from his pocket a small book, which was like its owner—thin and shabby of covering. He seemed to find pleasure in reading it, for he turned over its pages with all the tenderness characteristic of one who loves what he reads. Now and again he glanced at his unfinished copy of the beautiful portrait of Andrea del Sarto, and once his eyes rested on another copy next to his, better and truer than his, and once he stooped to pick up a girl's prune-coloured tie, which had fallen from the neighbouring easel. After this he seemed to become unconscious of his surroundings, as unconscious, indeed, as any one of the pictures near him. Any one might have been justified in mistaking him for the portrait of a man, but that his lips moved; for it was his custom to read softly to himself.

The students passed back to their places, not

troubling to notice him, because they knew from experience that he never noticed them, and that all greetings were wasted on him and all words were wanton expenditure of breath. They had come to regard him very much in the same way as many of us regard the wonders of nature, without astonishment, without any questionings, and often without any interest. One girl, a new-comer, did chance to say to her companion :

“How ill that old man looks!”

“Oh, he always looks like that,” was the answer. “You will soon get accustomed to him. Come along! I must finish my ‘Blind Beggar’ this afternoon.”

In a few minutes most of the workers were busy again, although there were some who continued to chat quietly, and several young men who seemed reluctant to leave their girl friends, and who were by no means encouraged to go! One young man came to claim his book and pipe, which he had left in the charge of a bright-eyed girl, who was copying Sir Joshua’s “Angels.” She gave him his treasures, and received in exchange a dark-red rose, which she fastened in her belt; and then he returned to his portrait of Mrs. Siddons. But there was something in his disconsolate manner which made one suspect that he thought less of Mrs. Siddons’s beauty than of the beauty of the girl who was wearing the dark-red rose! The strangers, strolling through the rooms, stopped now and again to peer curiously at the students’

work. They were stared at indignantly by the students themselves, but they made no attempt to move away, and even ventured sometimes to pass criticisms of no tender character on some of the copies. The fierce-looking man who was copying "The Horse Fair" deliberately put down his brushes, folded his arms, and waited defiantly until they had gone by; but others, wiser in their generation, went on painting calmly. Several workers were painting the new Raphael; one of them was a white-haired old gentlewoman, whose hand was trembling, and yet skilful still. More than once she turned to give a few hints to the young girl near her, who looked in some distress and doubt. Just the needful help was given, and then the girl plied her brush merrily, smiling the while with pleasure and gratitude. There seemed to be a genial, kindly influence at work, a certain homeliness too, which must needs assert itself where many are gathered together, working side by side. All made a harmony: the wonderful pictures, collected from many lands and many centuries, each with its meaning and its message from the past; the ever-present memories of the painters themselves, who had worked and striven and conquered; and the living human beings, each with his wealth of earnest endeavour and hope.

Meanwhile the old man read on uninterruptedly until two hands were put over his book and a gentle voice said:

"Mr. Lindall, you have had no lunch again.

Do you know, I begin to hate Lucretius. He always makes you forget your food."

The old man looked up, and something like a smile passed over his joyless face when he saw Helen Stanley bending over him.

"Ah," he answered, "you must not hate Lucretius. I have had more pleasant hours with him than with any living person."

He rose and came forward to examine her copy of Andrea del Sarto's portrait.

"Yours is better than mine," he said, critically; "in fact, mine is a failure. I think I shall only get a small price for mine; indeed, I doubt whether I shall get sufficient to pay for my funeral."

"You speak dismally," she answered, smiling.

"I missed you yesterday," he continued, half dreamily. "I left my work, and I wandered through the rooms, and I did not even read Lucretius. Something seemed to have gone from my life. At first I thought it must be my favourite Raphael, or the Murillo; but it was neither the one nor the other; it was you. That was strange, was n't it? But you know we get accustomed to anything, and perhaps I should have missed you less the second day, and by the end of a week I should not have missed you at all. Mercifully, we have in us the power of forgetting."

"I do not wish to plead for myself," she said, "but I do not believe that you or any one could really forget. That which outsiders call forgetfulness might be called by the better name of resignation."

"I don't care about talking any more now," he said, suddenly, and he went to his easel and worked silently at his picture; and Helen Stanley glanced at him, and thought she had never seen her old companion look so forlorn and desolate as he did to-day. He looked as if no gentle hand had ever been placed on him in kindness and affection, and that seemed to her a terrible thing; for she was one of those prehistorically minded persons who persist in believing that affection is as needful to human life as rain to flower life. When first she came to work at the gallery—some twelve months ago—she had noticed this old man, and had wished for his companionship; she was herself lonely and sorrowful, and, although young, had to fight her own battles, and had learned something of the difficulties of fighting, and this had given her an experience beyond her years. She was not more than twenty-four years of age, but she looked rather older, and, though she had beautiful eyes, full of meaning and kindness, her features were decidedly plain as well as unattractive. There were some in the gallery who said among themselves jestingly that, as Mr. Lindall had waited so many years before talking to any one, he might have chosen some one better worth the waiting for! But they soon became accustomed to seeing Helen Stanley and Mr. Lindall together, and they laughed less than before; and meanwhile the acquaintance ripened into a sort of friendship, half sulky on his part and wholly kind on her part. He told her nothing about himself, and he asked nothing about



herself; for weeks he never even knew her name. Sometimes he did not speak at all, and the two friends would work silently side by side until it was time to go; and then he waited until she was ready, and walked with her across Trafalgar Square, where they parted and went their own ways.

But occasionally, when she least expected it, he would speak with glowing enthusiasm on art; then his eyes seemed to become bright, and his bent figure more erect, and his whole bearing proud and dignified. There were times, too, when he would speak on other subjects: on the morality of free thought, and on those who had died to vindicate free thought—on Bruno, of blessed memory, on him, and scores of others too. He would speak of the different schools of philosophy; he would laugh at himself, and at all who, having given time and thought to the study of life's complicated problems, had not reached one step further than the Old-World thinkers. Perhaps he would quote one of his favourite philosophers, and then suddenly relapse into silence, returning to his wonted abstraction and to his indifference to his surroundings. Helen Stanley had learned to understand his ways and to appreciate his mind, and, without intruding on him in any manner, had put herself gently into his life as his quiet champion and his friend. No one in her presence dared speak slightly of the old man, or to make fun of his tumble-down appearance, or of his worn-out silk hat with a crack in the side, or of his rag of a black tie, which, to-

gether with his overcoat, had "seen better days." Once she brought her needle and thread, and darned the torn sleeve during her lunch-time; and, though he never knew it, it was a satisfaction to her to have helped him.

To-day she noticed that he was painting badly, and that he seemed to take no interest in his work; but she went on busily with her own picture, and was so engrossed in it that she did not at first observe that he had packed up his brushes and was preparing to go home.

"Three more strokes," he said, quietly, "and you will have finished your picture. I shall never finish mine; perhaps you will be good enough to set it right for me. I am not coming here again. I don't seem to have caught the true expression; what do you think? But I am not going to let it worry me, for I am sure you will promise to do your best for me. See, I will hand over these colours and these brushes to you, and no doubt you will accept the palette as well. I have no further use for it."

Helen Stanley took the palette which he held out toward her, and looked at him as though she would wish to question him.

"It is very hot here," he continued, "and I am going out. I am tired of work."

He hesitated, and then added, "I should like you to come with me, if you can spare the time."

She packed up her things at once, and the two friends moved slowly away, he gazing absently at

the pictures, and she wondering in her mind as to the meaning of his strange mood.

When they were on the steps inside the building, he turned to Helen Stanley and said :

"I should like to go back to the pictures once more. I feel as if I must stand among them just a little longer. They have been my companions for so long that they are almost part of myself. I can close my eyes and recall them faithfully. But I want to take a last look at them ; I want to feel once more the presence of the great masters, and to refresh my mind with their genius. When I look at their work I think of their life, and can only wonder at their death. It was so strange that they should die."

They went back together, and he took her to his favourite pictures, but remained speechless before them, and she did not disturb his thoughts. At last he said :

"I am ready to go. I have said farewell to them all. I know nothing more wonderful than being among a number of fine pictures. It is almost overwhelming. One expects nature to be grand, but one does not expect man to be grand."

"You know we don't agree there," she answered. "*I* expect everything grand and great from man."

They went out of the gallery, and into Trafalgar Square. It was a scorching afternoon in August, but there was some cooling comfort in seeing the dancing water of the fountains sparkling so brightly in the sunshine.

"Do you mind stopping here a few minutes?" he said. "I should like to sit down and watch. There is so much to see."

She led the way to a seat, one end of which was occupied by a workman, who was sleeping soundly, and snoring too, his arms folded tightly together. He had a little clay pipe in the corner of his mouth; it seemed to be tucked in so snugly that there was not much danger of its falling to the ground. At last Helen spoke to her companion.

"What do you mean by saying that you will not be able to finish your picture? Perhaps you are not well. Indeed, you don't look well. You make me anxious, for I have a great regard for you."

"I am ill and suffering," he answered, quietly. "I thought I should have died yesterday; but I made up my mind to live until I saw you again, and I thought I would ask you to spend the afternoon with me, and go with me to Westminster Abbey, and sit with me in the cloisters. I do not feel able to go by myself, and I know of no one to ask except you; and I believed you would not refuse me, for you have been very kind to me. I do not quite understand why you have been kind to me, but I am wonderfully grateful to you. To-day I heard some one in the gallery say that you were plain. I turned round and I said, 'I beg your pardon; I think she is very beautiful.' I think they laughed, and that puzzled me; for you have always seemed to me a very beautiful person."

At that moment the little clay pipe fell from the

workman's mouth and was broken into bits. He awoke with a start, gazed stupidly at the old man and his companion, and at the broken clay pipe.

"Curse my luck!" he said, yawning. "I was fond of that damned little pipe."

The old man drew his own pipe and his own tobacco-pouch from his pocket.

"Take these, stranger," he said. "I don't want them. And good luck to you."

The man's face brightened up as he took the pipe and pouch.

"You're uncommon kind," he said. "Can you spare them?" he added, holding them out half reluctantly.

"Yes," answered the old man; "I shall not smoke again. You may as well have these matches too."

The labourer put them in his pocket, smiled his thanks, and walked some little distance off; and Helen watched him examine his new pipe, and then fill it with tobacco and light it.

Mr. Lindall proposed that they should be getting on their way to Westminster, and they soon found themselves in the abbey. They sat together in the Poets' Corner; a smile of quiet happiness broke over the old man's tired face as he looked around and took in all the solemn beauty and grandeur of the resting-place of the great.

"You know," he said, half to himself, half to his companion, "I have no belief of any kind, and no hopes and no fears; but all through my life it

has been a comfort to me to sit quietly in a church or a cathedral. The graceful arches, the sun shining through the stained windows, the vaulted roof, the noble columns, have helped me to understand the mystery which all our books of philosophy cannot make clear, though we bend over them year after year, and grow old over them, old in age and in spirit. Though I myself have never been outwardly a worshipper, I have never sat in a place of worship but that, for the time being, I have felt a better man. But directly the voice of doctrine or dogma was raised the spell was broken for me, and that which I hoped was being made clear had no further meaning for me. There was only one voice which ever helped me, the voice of the organ, arousing me, thrilling me, filling me with strange longing, with welcome sadness, with solemn gladness. I have always thought that music can give an answer when everything else is of no avail. I do not know what you believe."

"I am so young to have found out," she said, almost pleadingly.

"Don't worry yourself," he answered, kindly. "Be brave and strong, and let the rest go. I should like to live long enough to see what you will make of your life. I believe you will never be false to yourself or to any one. That is rare. I believe you will not let any lower ideal take the place of your high ideal of what is beautiful and noble in art, in life. I believe that you will never let despair get the upper hand of you. If it does

you may as well die ; yes, you may as well. And I entreat you not to lose your entire faith in humanity. There is nothing like that for withering up the very core of the heart. I tell you, humanity and nature have so much in common with each other that if you lose your entire faith in the former you will lose part of your pleasure in the latter ; you will see less beauty in the trees, the flowers, and the fields, less grandeur in the mighty mountains and the sea. The seasons will come and go, and you will scarcely heed their coming and going : winter will settle over your soul, just as it settled over mine. And you see what I am."

They had now passed into the cloisters, and they sat down in one of the recesses of the windows, and looked out upon the rich plot of grass which the cloisters enclose. There was not a soul there except themselves ; the cool and the quiet and the beauty of the spot refreshed these pilgrims, and they rested in calm enjoyment.

Helen was the first to break the silence.

"I am glad you have brought me here," she said ; "I shall never grumble now at not being able to afford a fortnight in the country. This is better than anything else."

"It has always been my summer holiday to come here," he said. "When I first came I was like you, young and hopeful, and I had wonderful visions of what I intended to do and to be. Here it was I made a vow that I would become a great painter, and win for myself a resting-place in this

very abbey. There is humour in the situation, is there not?"

"I don't like to hear you say that," she answered. "It is not always possible for us to fulfil all our ambitions. Still, it is better to have had them, and failed of them, than not to have had them at all."

"Possibly," he replied, coldly. Then he added, "I wish you would tell me something about yourself. You have always interested me."

"I have nothing to tell you about myself," she answered, frankly. "I am alone in the world, without friends and without relations. The very name I use is not a real name. I was a foundling. At times I am sorry I do not belong to any one, and at other times I am glad. You know I am fond of books and of art, so my life is not altogether empty; and I find my pleasure, in hard work. When I saw you at the gallery I wished to know you, and I asked one of the students who you were. He told me you were a misanthrope. Then I did not care so much about knowing you, until one day you spoke to me about my painting, and that was the beginning of our friendship."

"Forty years ago," he said, sadly, "the friend of my boyhood deceived me. I had not thought it possible that he could be false to me. He screened himself behind me, and became prosperous and respected at the expense of my honour. I vowed I would never again make a friend. A few years later, when I was beginning to hold up my head, the woman whom I loved deceived me. Then I



put from me all affection and all love. Greater natures than mine are better able to bear these troubles, but my heart contracted and withered up."

He paused for a moment, many recollections overpowering him. Then he went on telling her the history of his life, unfolding to her the story of his hopes and ambitions, describing to her the very home where he was born, and the dark-eyed sister whom he had loved, and with whom he had played over the daisied fields, and through the carpeted woods, and all among the richly tinted bracken. One day he was told she was dead, and that he must never speak her name; but he spoke it all the day and all the night,—Beryl, nothing but Beryl,—and he looked for her in the fields and in the woods and among the bracken. It seemed as if he had unlocked the casket of his heart, closed for so many years, and as if all the memories of the past and all the secrets of his life were rushing out, glad to be free once more, and grateful for the open air of sympathy.

"Beryl was as swift as a deer!" he exclaimed. "You would have laughed to see her on the moor. Ah, it was hard to give up all thoughts of meeting her again. They told me I should see her in heaven, but I did not care about heaven. I wanted Beryl on earth, as I knew her, a merry, laughing sister. I think you are right: we don't forget; we become resigned in a dead, dull kind of way."

Suddenly he said, "I don't know why I have told you all this. And yet it has been such a pleasure

to me. You are the only person to whom I could have spoken about myself, for no one else but you would have cared."

"Don't you think," she said, gently, "that you made a mistake in letting your experiences embitter you? Because you had been unlucky in one or two instances it did not follow that all the world was against you. Perhaps you unconsciously put yourself against all the world, and therefore saw every one in an unfavourable light. It seems so easy to do that. Trouble comes to most people, does n't it? And your philosophy should have taught you to make the best of it. At least, that is my notion of the value of philosophy."

She spoke hesitatingly, as though she gave utterance to these words against her will.

"I am sure you are right, child," he said, eagerly.

He put his hands to his eyes, but he could not keep back the tears.

"I have been such a lonely old man," he sobbed; "no one can tell what a lonely, loveless life mine has been. If I were not so old and so tired I should like to begin all over again."

He sobbed for many minutes, and she did not know what to say to him of comfort; but she took his hand within her own, and gently caressed it, as one might do to a little child in pain. He looked up and smiled through his tears.

"You have been very good to me," he said, "and I dare say you have thought me ungrateful. You mended my coat for me one morning, and not a

day has passed but that I have looked at the darn and thought of you. I liked to remember that you had done it for me. But you have done far more than this for me: you have put some sweetness into my life. Whatever becomes of me hereafter, I shall never be able to think of my life on earth as anything but beautiful, because you thought kindly of me and acted kindly for me. The other night, when this terrible pain came over me, I wished you were near me; I wished to hear your voice. There is very beautiful music in your voice."

"I would have come to you gladly," she said, smiling quietly at him. "You must make a promise that when you feel ill again you will send for me. Then you will see what a splendid nurse I am, and how soon you will become strong and well under my care, strong enough to paint many more pictures, each one better than the last. Now will you promise?"

"Yes," he said, and he raised her hand reverently to his lips.

"You are not angry with me for doing that?" he asked, suddenly. "I should not like to vex you."

"I am not vexed," she answered, kindly.

"Then perhaps I may kiss it once more?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered; and again he raised her hand to his lips.

"Thank you," he said, quietly; "that was kind of you. Do you see that broken sun-ray yonder?"

Is it not golden? I find it very pleasant to sit here; and I am quite happy, and almost free from pain. Lately I have been troubled with a dull, thudding pain near my heart; but now I feel so strong that I believe I shall finish that *Andrea del Sarto* after all."

"Of course you will," she answered, cheerily, "and I shall have to confess that yours is better than mine! I am quite willing to yield the palm to you."

"I must alter the expression of the mouth," he replied. "That is the part which has worried me. I don't think I told you that I have had a commission to copy Rembrandt's 'Old Jew.' I must set to work on that next week."

"But you have given me your palette and brushes!" she laughed.

"You must be generous enough to lend them to me," he said, smiling. "By the way, I intend to give you my books, all of them. Some day I must show them to you. I especially value my philosophical books; they have been my faithful companions through many years. I believe you do not read Greek. That is a pity, because you would surely enjoy Aristotle. I think I must teach you Greek; it would be an agreeable legacy to leave you when I pass away into the Great Silence."

"I should like to learn," she said, wondering to hear him speak so unreservedly. It seemed as if some vast barrier had been rolled aside, and as if she were getting to know him better, having been

allowed to glance into his past life, to sympathise with his past mistakes, and with the failure of his ambitions, and with the deadening of his heart.

"You must read *Æschylus*," he continued, enthusiastically; "and, if I mistake not, the *Agamemnon* will be an epoch in your life. You will find that all these studies will serve to ennoble your art, and you will be able to put mind into your work, and not merely form and colour. Do you know, I feel so well that I believe I shall not only live to finish *Andrea del Sarto*, but also to smoke another pipe?"

"You have been too rash to-day," she laughed, "giving away your pipe and pouch, your palette and brushes, in this reckless manner! I must get you a new pipe to-morrow. I wonder you did not part with your venerable *Lucretius*."

"That reminds me," he said, fumbling in his pocket; "I think I have dropped my *Lucretius*. I fancy I left it somewhere in the Poets' Corner. It would grieve me to lose that book."

"Let me go and look for it," she said, and she advanced a few steps, and then came back to him.

"You have been saying many kind words to me," she said, as she put her hand on his arm, "and I have not told you that I value your friendship, and am grateful to you for letting me be more than a mere stranger to you. I have been very lonely in my life, for I am not one to make friends easily, and it has been a great privilege to me to talk with you. I want you to know this; for if I have been

anything to you, you have been a great deal to me. I have never met with much sympathy from those of my own age: I have found them narrow and unyielding, and they found me dull and uninteresting. They had passed through few experiences, and knew nothing about failure or success, and some of them did not even understand the earnestness of endeavour, and laughed at me when I spoke of a high ideal. So I withdrew into myself, and should probably have grown still more isolated than I was before, but that I met you, and, as time went on, we became friends. I shall always remember your teaching, and I will try to keep to a high ideal of life and art and endeavour, and I will not let despair creep into my heart, and I will not lose my faith in humanity."

As she spoke a lingering ray of sunshine lit up her face and gently caressed her soft brown hair; slight though her form, and sombre her clothes, and unlovely her features, she seemed a gracious presence because of her earnestness.

"Now," she said, cheerily, "you rest here until I come back with your Lucretius, and then I think I must be getting on my way home. But you must fix a time for our first Greek lesson, for we must begin to-morrow."

When she had gone he walked in the cloisters, holding his hat in his hand and his stick under his arm. There was a quiet smile on his face, which was called forth by pleasant thoughts in his mind, and he did not look quite so shrunken and shriv-

elled as usual. His eyes were fixed on the ground, but he raised them, and observed a white cat creeping toward him. It came and rubbed itself against his foot, and, purring with all its might, seemed determined to win some kind of notice from him. The old man stooped down to stroke it, and was just touching its sleek coat when he suddenly withdrew his hand and groaned deeply. He struggled to the recess, and sank back. The stick fell on the stone with a clatter, and the battered hat rolled down beside it, and the white cat fled away in terror; but realising that there was no cause for alarm, it came back and crouched near the silent figure of the old man, watching him intently. Then it stretched out its paw and played with his hand, doing its utmost to coax him into a little fun; but he would not be coaxed, and the cat lost all patience with him, and left him to himself.

Meanwhile Helen Stanley was looking for the lost Lucretius in the Poets' Corner. She found it lying near Chaucer's tomb, and was just going to take it to her friend when she saw the workman to whom they had spoken in Trafalgar Square. He recognised her at once, and came toward her.

"I 've been having a quiet half-hour here," he said. "It does me a sight of good to sit in the abbey."

"You should go into the cloisters," she said, kindly. "I have been sitting there with my friend. He will be interested to hear that you love this beautiful abbey."

"I should like to see him again," said the workman. "He had a kind way about him, and that pipe he gave me is an uncommon good one. Still, I am sorry I smashed the little clay pipe. I'd grown used to it. I'd smoked it ever since my little girl died and left me alone in the world. I used to bring my little girl here, and now I come alone. But it is n't the same thing."

"No, it could not be the same thing," said Helen, gently. "But you find some little comfort here?"

"Some little comfort," he answered. "One can't expect much."

They went together into the cloisters, and as they came near the recess where the old man rested Helen said:

"Why, he has fallen asleep! He must have been very tired. And he has dropped his hat and stick. Thank you. If you will put them down there, I will watch by his side until he wakes up. I don't suppose he will sleep for long."

The workman stooped down to pick up the hat and stick, and glanced at the sleeper. Something in the sleeper's countenance arrested his attention. He turned to the girl, and saw that she was watching him.

"What is it?" she asked, anxiously. "What is the matter with you?"

He tried to speak, but his voice failed him, and all he could do was to point with trembling hand to the old man.

Helen looked, and a loud cry broke from her lips. The old man was dead.





# THE OMNIBUS

BY  
QUILLER-COUCH



## THE OMNIBUS

BY QUILLER-COUCH

ALL that follows was spoken in a small tavern, a stone's throw from Cheapside, the day before I left London. It was spoken in a dull voice, across a greasy table-cloth, and amid an atmosphere so thick with the reek of cooking that one longed to change it for the torrid street again, to broil in an ampler furnace. Old Tom Pickford spoke it, who has been a clerk for fifty-two years in Tweedy's East India warehouse, and in all that time has never been out of London, but when he takes a holiday spends it in hanging about Tweedy's; and observing that unlovely place of business from the outside. The dust, if not the iron, of Tweedy's has entered into his soul; and Tweedy's young men know him as "the Mastodon." He is a thin, bald septuagenarian, with sloping shoulders, and a habit of regarding the pavement when he walks, so that he seems to steer his way by instinct rather than sight. In general he keeps silence while eating his chop; and on this occasion there was something unnatural in his utterance, a divorce of manner between the speaker and his words, such as one would expect in a sibyl disclaiming under stress of the god. I fancied it had something to do with

a black necktie that he wore instead of the blue bird's-eye cravat familiar to Tweedy's, and with his extraordinary conduct in refusing to-day the chop that the waiter brought, and limiting his lunch to cheese and lettuce.

Having pulled the lettuce to pieces, he pushed himself back a little from the table, looked over his spectacles at me, then at the table-cloth, and began in a dreamy voice :

"Old Gabriel is dead. I heard the news at the office this morning, and went out and bought a black tie. I am the oldest man in Tweedy's now—older by six years than Sam Collins, who comes next ; so there is no mistake about it. Sam is looking for the place ; I saw it in his eye when he told me, and I expect he 'll get it. But I 'm the oldest clerk in Tweedy's. Only God Almighty can alter that, and it 's very satisfactory to me. I don't care about the money. Sam Collins will be stuck up over it, like enough ; but he 'll never write a hand like Gabriel's, not if he lives to be a hundred ; and he knows it, and knows I 'll be there to remind him of it. Gabriel's was a beautiful fist—so small, too, if he chose. Why, once, in his spare hours, he wrote out all the Psalms, with the headings, on one side of a folio sheet, and had it framed and hung up in his parlour, out at Shepherd's Bush. He died in the night—oh yes, quite easily. He was down at the office all yesterday, and spoke to me as brisk as a bird. They found him dead in his bed this morning.

"I seem cut up about it? Well, not exactly. Ah, you noticed that I refused my chop to-day. Bless your soul, that 's not on Gabriel's account. I am well on in years, and I suppose it would be natural of me to pity old men, and expect pity. But I can't; no, *it's only the young that I pity*. If you *must* know, I did n't take a chop to-day because I have n't the money in my pocket to pay for it. You see, there was this black tie that I gave eighteenpence for; but something else happened this morning that I 'll tell you about.

"I came down in a 'bus, as usual. You remember what muggy weather it was up to ten o'clock—though you would n't think it, to feel the heat now. Well, the 'bus was packed, inside and out. At least, there was just room for one more inside when we pulled up by Charing Cross, and there he got in—a boy with a stick and a bundle in a blue handkerchief.

"He was n't more than thirteen; bound for the docks, you could tell at a glance; and by the way he looked about you could tell as easily that in stepping outside Charing Cross station he 'd set foot on London stones for the first time. God knows how it struck him—the slush and drizzle, the ugly shop-fronts, the horses slipping in the brown mud, the crowd on the pavement pushing him this side and that. The poor little chap was standing in the middle of it with dazed eyes, like a hare's, when the 'bus pulled up. His eyelids were pink and swollen; but he was n't crying, though he



wanted to. Instead, he gave a gulp as he came on board with stick and bundle, and tried to look brave as a lion.

"I 'd have given worlds to speak to him, but I could n't. On my word, sir, I should have cried. It was n't so much the little chap's look. But to the knot of his bundle there was tied a bunch of cottage flowers,—sweet-williams, boy's-love, and a rose or two,—and the sight and smell of them in that stuffy omnibus were like tears on thirsty eyelids. It 's the young that I pity, sir. For Gabriel, in his bed up at Shepherd's Bush, there 's no more to be said, as far as I can see; and as for me, I 'm the oldest clerk in Tweedy's, which is very satisfactory. It 's the young faces, set toward the road along which we have travelled, that trouble me. Sometimes, sir, I lie awake in my lodgings and listen, and the whole of this London seems filled with the sound of children's feet running, and I can sob aloud. You may say that it is only selfishness, and what I really pity is my own boyhood. I dare say you 're right. It 's certain that, as I kept glancing at the boy and his sea kit and his bunch of flowers, my mind went back to the January morning, sixty-five years back, when the coach took me off for the first time from the village where I was born to a London charity-school. I was worse off than the boy in the omnibus, for I had just lost father and mother. Yet it was the sticks and stones and flower-beds that I mostly thought of. I went round and said good-bye to the lilacs, and told them to be

in flower by the time I came back. I said to the rose-bush, 'You must be as high as my window next May; you know you only missed it by three inches last summer.' Then I went to the cow-house, and kissed the cows, one by one. They were to be sold by auction the very next week, but I guessed nothing of it, and ordered them not to forget me. And last I looked at the swallows' nests under the thatch,—the last year's nests,—and told myself that they would be filled again when I returned. I remembered this, and how I stretched out my hands to the place from the coach-top; and how at Reading, where we stopped, I spent the two shillings that I possessed in a cocoanut and a bright clasp-knife; and how I broke the knife in opening the nut; and how, when I opened it, the nut was sour; and how I cried myself to sleep, and woke in London.

"The young men in Tweedy's, though they respect my long standing there, make fun of me at times because I never take a holiday in the country. Why, sir, *I dare not*. I should wander back to my old village, and— Well, I know how it would be then. I should find it smaller and meaner; I should search about for the flowers and nests, and listen for the music that I knew sixty-five years ago, and remember; and they would not be discoverable. Also every face would stare at me, for all the faces I know are dead. Then I should think I had missed my way and come to the wrong place; or (worse) that no such spot ever existed,



and I have been cheating myself all these years ; that, in fact, I was mad all the while, and have no stable reason for existing—I, the oldest clerk in Tweedy's! To be sure, there would be my parents' headstones in the churchyard. But what are they, if the churchyard itself is changed?

"As it is, with three hundred pounds per annum, and enough laid by to keep him, if I fail, an old bachelor has no reason to grumble. But the sight of that little chap's nosegay, and the thought of the mother who tied it there, made my heart swell as I fancy the earth must swell when rain is coming. His eyes filled once, and he brushed them under pretence of pulling his cap forward, and stole a glance round to see if any one had noticed him. The other passengers were busy with their own thoughts, and I pretended to stare out of the window opposite ; but there was the drop, sure enough, on his hand as he laid it on his lap again.

"He was bound for the docks, and thence for the open sea, and I, that was bound for Tweedy's only, had to get out at the top of Cheapside. I know the 'bus conductor,—a very honest man,—and, in getting out, I slipped half a crown into his hand to give to the boy, with my blessing, at his journey's end. When I picture his face, sir, I wish I had made it five shillings, and gone without a new tie and dinner altogether."

# THE HIRED BABY

BY

MARIE CORELLI





## THE HIRED BABY

BY MARIE CORELLI

A DARK, desolate December night, a night that clung to the metropolis like a wet black shroud, a night in which the heavy, low-hanging vapours melted every now and then into a slow, reluctant rain, cold as icicle-drops in a rock cavern. People passed and repassed in the streets like ghosts in a bad dream; the twinkling gas-light showed them at one moment rising out of the fog, and then disappearing from view as though suddenly engulfed in a vaporous ebon sea. With muffled, angry shrieks, the metropolitan trains deposited their shoals of shivering, coughing travellers at the several stations, where sleepy officials, rendered vicious by the weather, snatched the tickets from their hands with offensive haste and roughness. Omnibus conductors grew ill-tempered and abusive without any seemingly adequate reason; shopkeepers became flippant, disobliging, and careless of custom; cabmen shouted derisive or denunciatory language after their rapidly retreating fares; in short, everybody was in a discontented, almost spiteful humour, with the exception of those few aggressively cheerful persons who are in the habit of always making the best of everything,

even bad weather. Down the long wide vista of the Cromwell Road, Kensington, the fog had it all its own way ; it swept on steadily, like thick smoke from a huge fire, choking the throats and blinding the eyes of foot-passengers, stealing through the crannies of the houses, and chilling the blood of even those luxurious individuals who, seated in elegant drawing-rooms before blazing fires, easily forgot that there were such bitter things as cold and poverty in that outside world against which they had barred their windows. At one house in particular—a house with gaudy glass doors and somewhat soiled yellow silk curtains at the windows, a house that plainly said to itself, “ Done up for show ! ” to all who cared to examine its exterior—there stood a closed brougham, drawn by a prancing pair of fat horses. A coachman of distinguished appearance sat on the box ; a footman of irreproachable figure stood waiting on the pavement, his yellow-gloved hand resting elegantly on the polished silver knob of the carriage door. Both these gentlemen were resolute and inflexible of face ; they looked as if they had determined on some great deed that should move the world to wild applause ; but, truth to tell, they had only just finished a highly satisfactory “ meat-tea,” and before this grave silence had fallen upon them they had been discussing the advisability of broiled steak and onions for supper. The coachman had inclined to plain mutton-chops as being easier of digestion ; the footman had earnestly asseverated

his belief in the superior succulence and sweetness of the steak and onions, and in the end he had gained his point. This weighty question being settled, they had gradually grown reflective on the past, present, and future joys of eating at some one else's expense, and in this bland and pleasing state of meditation they were still absorbed. The horses were impatient, and pawed the muddy ground with many a toss of their long manes and tails, the steam from their glossy coats mingling with the ever-thickening density of the fog. On the white stone steps of the residence before which they waited was an almost invisible bundle, apparently shapeless and immovable. Neither of the two gorgeous personages in livery observed it; it was too far back in a dim corner, too unobtrusive, for the casual regard of their lofty eyes. Suddenly the glass doors before mentioned were thrown apart with a clattering noise, a warmth and radiance from the entrance-hall thus displayed streamed into the foggy street, and at the same instant the footman, still with grave and imperturbable countenance, opened the brougham. An elderly lady, richly dressed, with diamonds sparkling in her gray hair, came rustling down the steps, bringing with her faint odours of patchouly and violet-powder. She was followed by a girl of doll-like prettiness, with a snub nose and petulant little mouth, who held up her satin-and-lace skirts with a sort of fastidious disdain, as though she scorned to set foot on earth that was not carpeted with the best velvet pile.

As they approached their carriage the inert dark bundle, crouched in the corner, started into life—a woman, with wild hair and wilder eyes, whose pale lips quivered with suppressed weeping as her piteous voice broke into sudden clamour:

“Oh, lady!” she cried, “for the love of God, a trifle! Oh, lady, lady!”

But the “lady,” with a contemptuous sniff and a shake of her scented garments, passed her before she could continue her appeal, and she turned with a sort of faint hope to the softer face of the girl.

“Oh, my dear, do have pity! Just the smallest little thing, and God will bless you! You are rich and happy—and I am starving! Only a penny! For the baby—the poor little baby!” And she made as though she would open her tattered shawl and reveal some treasure hidden therein, but shrunk back, repelled by the cold, merciless gaze that fell upon her from those eyes, in which youth dwelt without tenderness.

“You have no business on our door-step,” said the girl, harshly. “Go away directly, or I shall tell my servant to call a policeman.”

Then, as she entered the brougham after her mother, she addressed the respectable footman angrily, giving him the benefit of a strong nasal intonation.

“Howard, why do you let such dirty beggars come near the carriage? What are you paid for, I should like to know? It is perfectly disgraceful to the house!”

"Very sorry, miss!" said the footman, gravely. "I did n't see the—the person before." Then shutting the brougham door, he turned with a dignified air to the unfortunate creature, who still lingered near, and, with a sweeping gesture of his gold-embroidered coat-sleeve, said majestically:

"Do you 'ear? Be hoff!"

Then, having thus performed his duty, he mounted the box beside his friend the coachman, and the equipage rattled quickly away, its gleaming lights soon lost in the smoke-laden vapours that drooped downward like funeral hangings from the invisible sky to the scarcely visible ground. Left to herself, the woman who had vainly sought charity from those in whom no charity existed, looked up despairingly, as one distraught, and seemed as though she would have given vent to some fierce exclamation, when a feeble wail came pitifully forth from the sheltering folds of her shawl. She restrained herself instantly, and walked on at a rapid pace, scarcely heeding whither she went, till she reached the Catholic church known as the "Oratory." Its unfinished façade loomed darkly out of the fog; there was nothing picturesque or inviting about it, yet there were people passing softly in and out, and through the swinging to and fro of the red baize-covered doors there came a comforting warm glimmer of light. The woman paused, hesitated, and then, having apparently made up her mind, ascended the broad steps, looked in, and finally entered. The place was



strange to her; she knew nothing of its religious meaning, and its cold, uncompleted appearance oppressed her. There were only some half-dozen persons scattered about, like black specks, in its vast white interior, and the fog hung heavily in the vaulted dome and dark little chapels. One corner alone blazed with brilliancy and colour; this was the altar of the Virgin. Toward it the tired vagrant made her way, and on reaching it sank on the nearest chair as though exhausted. She did not raise her eyes to the marble splendours of the shrine—one of the masterpieces of old Italian art; she had been merely attracted to the spot by the glitter of the lamps and candles, and took no thought as to the reason of their being lighted, though she was sensible of a certain comfort in the soft lustre shed around her. She seemed still young; her face, rendered haggard by long and bitter privation, showed traces of past beauty, and her eyes, full of feverish trouble, were large, dark, and still lustrous. Her mouth alone—that sensitive betrayer of the life's good and bad actions—revealed that all had not been well with her; its lines were hard and vicious, and the resentful curve of the upper lip spoke of foolish pride, not unmingled with reckless sensuality. She sat for a moment or two motionless; then, with exceeding care and tenderness, she began to unfold her thin, torn shawl by gentle degrees, looking down with anxious solicitude at the object concealed within. Only a baby—and withal a baby so tiny and white

and frail that it seemed as though it must melt like a snowflake beneath the lightest touch. As its wrappings were loosened it opened a pair of large, solemn blue eyes, and gazed at the woman's face with a strange, pitiful wistfulness. It lay quiet, without moan, a pinched, pale miniature of suffering humanity—an infant with sorrow's mark painfully impressed upon its drawn, small features. Presently it stretched forth a puny hand and feebly caressed its protectress, and this, too, with the faintest glimmer of a smile. The woman responded to its affection with a sort of rapture; she caught it fondly to her breast and covered it with kisses, rocking it to and fro with broken words of endearment. "My little darling!" she whispered, softly. "My little pet! Yes, yes, I know! 'So tired, so cold and hungry! Never mind, baby, never mind! We will rest here a little; then we will sing a song presently, and get some money to take us home. Sleep awhile longer, deary! There! now we are warm and cosey again."

So saying, she rearranged her shawl in closer and tighter folds, so as to protect the child more thoroughly. While she was engaged in this operation a lady in deep mourning passed close by her, and, advancing to the very steps of the altar, knelt down, hiding her face with her clasped hands. The tired wayfarer's attention was attracted by this; she gazed with a sort of dull wonder at the kneeling figure robed in rich rustling silk and crape, and gradually her eyes wandered upward, upward, till

they rested on the gravely sweet and serenely smiling marble image of the Virgin and Child. She looked and looked again—surprised—incredulous; then suddenly rose to her feet and made her way to the altar railing. There she paused, staring vaguely at a basket of flowers, white and odorous, that had been left there by some reverent worshipper. She glanced doubtfully at the swinging silver lamps, the twinkling candles; she was conscious, too, of a subtle, strange fragrance in the air, as though a basket full of spring violets and daffodils had just been carried by; then, as her wandering gaze came back to the solitary woman in black, who still knelt motionless near her, a sort of choking sensation came into her throat and a stinging moisture struggled in her eyes. She strove to turn this hysterical sensation to a low laugh of disdain.

“Lord, Lord!” she muttered beneath her breath, “what sort of place is this, where they pray to a woman and a baby?”

At that moment the woman in black rose; she was young, with a proud, fair, but weary face. Her eyes lighted on her soiled and poverty-stricken sister, and she paused with a pitying look. The street wanderer made use of the opportunity thus offered, and in an urgent whisper implored charity. The lady drew out a purse, then hesitated, looking wistfully at the bundle in the shawl.

“You have a little child there?” she asked, in gentle accents. “May I see it?”

"Yes, lady," and the wrapper was turned down sufficiently to disclose the tiny white face, now more infinitely touching than ever in the pathos of sleep.

"I lost my little one a week ago," said the lady, simply, as she looked at it. "He was all I had." Her voice trembled; she opened her purse, and placed a half-crown in the hand of her astonished supplicant. "You are happier than I am; perhaps you will pray for me. I am very lonely!"

Then dropping her long crape veil so that it completely hid her features, she bent her head and moved softly away. The woman watched her till her graceful figure was completely lost in the gloom of the great church, and then turned again vaguely to the altar.

"Pray for her!" she thought. "I! As if I could pray!" And she smiled bitterly. Again she looked at the statue in the shrine; it had no meaning at all for her. She had never heard of Christianity save through the medium of a tract, whose consoling title had been "Stop! You are Going to Hell!" Religion of every sort was mocked at by those among whom her lot was cast, the name of Christ was only used as a convenience to swear by, and therefore this mysterious, smiling, gently inviting marble figure was incomprehensible to her mind.

"As if I could pray!" she repeated, with a sort of derision. Then she looked at the broad silver coin in her hand and the sleeping baby in her

arms. With a sudden impulse she dropped on her knees.

"Whoever you are," she muttered, addressing the statue above her, "it seems you 've got a child of your own; perhaps you 'll help me to take care of this one. It is n't mine; I wish it was! Anyway, I love it more than its own mother does. I dare say you won't listen to the likes of me, but if there was God anywhere about I 'd ask Him to bless that good soul that 's lost her baby. I bless her with all my heart, but my blessing ain't good for much. Ah!" and she surveyed anew the Virgin's serene white countenance, "you just look as if you understood me; but I don't believe you do. Never mind, I 've said all I wanted to say this time."

Her strange petition, or rather discourse, concluded, she rose and walked away. The great doors of the church swung heavily behind her as she stepped out and stood once more in the muddy street. It was raining steadily—a fine, cold, penetrating rain. But the coin she held was a talisman against outer discomforts, and she continued to walk on till she came to a clean-looking dairy, where for a couple of pence she was able to replenish the infant's long ago emptied feeding-bottle; but she purchased nothing for herself. She had starved all day, and was now too faint to eat. Soon she entered an omnibus, and was driven to Charing Cross, and alighting at the great station, brilliant with its electric light, she paced up and

down outside it, accosting several of the passers-by and imploring their pity. One man gave her a penny; another, young and handsome, with a flushed, intemperate face, and a look of his fast-fading boyhood still about him, put his hand in his pocket and drew out all the loose coppers it contained, amounting to three pennies and an odd farthing, and, dropping them into her outstretched palm, said, half gaily, half boldly: "You ought to do better than that with those big eyes of yours!" She drew back and shuddered; he broke into a coarse laugh, and went his way. Standing where he had left her, she seemed for a time lost in wretched reflections; the fretful, wailing cry of the child she carried roused her, and hushing it softly, she murmured, "Yes, yes, darling, it is too wet and cold for you; we had better go." And acting suddenly on her resolve, she hailed another omnibus, this time bound for Tottenham Court Road, and was, after some dreary jolting, set down at her final destination—a dirty alley in the worst part of Seven Dials. Entering it, she was hailed with a shout of derisive laughter from some rough-looking men and women, who were standing grouped round a low gin-shop at the corner.

"Here 's Liz!" cried one. "Here 's Liz and the bloomin' kid!"

"Now, old gel, fork out! How much 'ave you got, Liz? Treat us to a drop all round!"

Liz walked past them steadily; the conspicuous curve of her upper lip came into full play, and

her eyes flashed disdainfully, but she said nothing. Her silence exasperated a tangle-haired, cat-faced girl of some seventeen years, who, more than half drunk, sat on the ground, clasping her knees with both arms and rocking herself lazily to and fro.

"Mother Mawks!" cried she, "Mother Mawks! You 're wanted! Here 's Liz come back with your babby!"

As if her words had been a powerful incantation to summon forth an evil spirit, a door in one of the miserable houses was thrown open, and a stout woman, nearly naked to the waist, with a swollen, blotched, and most hideous countenance, rushed out furiously, and darting at Liz, shook her violently by the arm.

"Where 's my shullin'?" she yelled, "where 's my gin? Out with it! Out with my shullin' an' fourpence! None of yer sneakin' ways with me; a bargain 's a bargain all the world over! Yer 're makin' a fortin' with my babby—yer know y' are; pays yer a deal better than yer old trade! Don't say it don't—yer knows it do. Yer 'll not find such a sickly kid anywheres, an' it 's the sickly kids wot pays an' moves the 'arts of the kyind ladies an' good gentlemen"—this with an imitative whine that excited the laughter and applause of her hearers. "Yer 've got it cheap, I kin tell yer, an' if yer don't pay up reg'lar, there 's others that 'll take the chance, an' thankful too!"

She stopped for lack of breath, and Liz spoke quietly:

"It's all right, Mother Mawks," she said, with an attempt at a smile; "here's your shilling, here's the four pennies for the gin. I don't owe you anything for the child now." She stopped and hesitated, looking down tenderly at the frail creature in her arms; then added, almost pleadingly, "It's asleep now. May I take it with me to-night?"

Mother Mawks, who had been testing the coins Liz had given her by biting them ferociously with her large yellow teeth, broke into a loud laugh.

"Take it with yer! I like that! Wot impudence! Take it with yer!" Then, with her huge red arms akimbo, she added, with a grin, "Tell yer wot, if yer likes to pay me 'arf a crown, yer can 'ave it to cuddle, an' welcome!"

Another shout of approving merriment burst from the drink-sodden spectators of the little scene, and the girl crouched on the ground removed her encircling hands from her knees to clap them loudly, as she exclaimed:

"Well done, Mother Mawks! One does n't let out kids at night for nothing! 'T ought to be more expensive than daytime!"

The face of Liz had grown white and rigid.

"You know I can't give you that money," she said, slowly. "I have not tasted bit or drop all day. I must live, though it does n't seem worth while. The child"—and her voice softened involuntarily—"is fast asleep; it's a pity to wake it, that's all. It will cry and fret all night, and—and



I would make it warm and comfortable if you 'd let me." She raised her eyes hopefully and anxiously. "Will you?"

Mother Mawks was evidently a lady of an excitable disposition. The simple request seemed to drive her nearly frantic. She raised her voice to an absolute scream, thrusting her dirty hands through her still dirtier hair as the proper accompanying gesture to her vituperative oratory.

"Will I! Will I!" she screeched. "Will I let out my hown babby for the night for nuthin'? Will I? No, I won't! I'll see yer blowed into the middle of next week fust! Lor' 'a' mussey! 'ow 'igh an' mighty we are gittin', to be sure! The babby 'll be quiet with you, Miss Liz, will it, hindeed! An' it will cry an' fret with its hown mother, will it, hindeed!" And at every sentence she approached Liz more nearly, increasing in fury as she advanced. "Yer low hussy! D' ye think I 'd let yer 'ave my babby for a hour unless yer paid for 't? As it is, yer pays far too little. I 'm an honest woman as works for my livin' an' wot drinks reasonable, better than you by a long sight, with yer stuck-up airs! A pretty drab you are! 'Gi' me the babby; ye 'a'n't no business to keep it a minit longer." And she made a grab at Liz's sheltering shawl.

"Oh, don't hurt it!" pleaded Liz, tremblingly. "Such a little thing—don't hurt it!"

Mother Mawks stared so wildly that her blood-shot eyes seemed protruding from her head.

“’Urt it! Hain’t I a right to do wot I likes with my hown babby? ’Urt it! Well, I never! Look ’ere!”—and she turned round on the assembled neighbours—“hain’t she a reg’lar one? She don’t care for the law, not she! She ’s keepin’ back a child from its hown mother!” And with that she made a fierce attack on the shawl, and succeeded in dragging the infant from Liz’s reluctant arms. Wakened thus roughly from its slumbers, the poor mite set up a feeble wailing; its mother, enraged at the sound, shook it violently till it gasped for breath.

“Drat the litt e beast!” she cried. “Why don’t it choke an’ ’ave done with it!”

And, without heeding the terrified remonstrances of Liz, she flung the child roughly, as though it were a ball, through the open door of her lodgings, where it fell on a heap of dirty clothes, and lay motionless; its wailing had ceased.

“Oh, baby, baby!” exclaimed Liz, in accents of poignant distress. “Oh, you have killed it, I am sure! Oh, you are cruel, cruel! Oh, baby, baby!”

And she broke into a tempestuous passion of sobs and tears. The bystanders looked on in unmoved silence. Mother Mawks gathered her torn garments round her with a gesture of defiance, and sniffed the air as though she said, “Any one who wants to meddle with me will get the worst of it.” There was a brief pause; suddenly a man staggered out of the gin-shop, smearing the back

of his hand across his mouth as he came—a massively built, ill-favoured brute, with a shock of uncombed red hair and small ferret-like eyes. He stared stupidly at the weeping Liz, then at Mother Mawks, finally from one to the other of the loafers who stood by. “Wot ’s the row?” he demanded, thickly. “Wot ’s up? ’Ave it out fair! Joe Mawks ’ll stand by and see fair game. Fire away, my hearties! fire, fire away!” And, with a chuckling idiot laugh, he dived into the pocket of his torn corduroy trousers and produced a pipe. Filling this leisurely from a greasy pouch, with such unsteady fingers that the tobacco dropped all over him, he lighted it, repeating, with increased thickness of utterance, “Wot ’s the row? ’Ave it out fair!”

“It ’s about your babby, Joe!” cried the girl before mentioned, jumping up from her seat on the ground with such force that her hair came tumbling all about her in a dark, dank mist, through which her thin, eager face spitefully peered. “Liz has gone crazy! She wants your babby to cuddle!” And she screamed with sudden laughter. “Eh, eh, fancy! Wants a babby to cuddle!”

The stupefied Joe blinked drowsily and sucked the stem of his pipe with apparent relish. Then, as if he had been engaged in deep meditation on the subject, he removed his smoky consoler from his mouth, and said, “W’y not? Wants a babby to cuddle? All right! Let ’er ’ave it—w’y not?”

At these words Liz looked up hopefully through

her tears, but Mother Mawks darted forward in raving indignation.

"Yer great drunken fool!" she yelled to her besotted spouse, "are n't yer ashamed of yerself? Wot! let out yer babby for a whole night for nuthin'? It 's lucky I 've got my wits about me, an' I say Liz sha'n't 'ave it! There, now!"

The man looked at her, and a dogged resolution darkened his repulsive countenance. He raised his big fist, clinched it, and hit straight out, giving his infuriated wife a black eye in much less than a minute. "An' I say she shall 'ave it. Where are ye now?"

In answer to the query Mother Mawks might have said that she was "all there," for she returned her husband's blow with interest and force, and in a couple of seconds the happy pair were engaged in a "stand-up" fight, to the intense admiration and excitement of all the inhabitants of the little alley. Every one in the place thronged to watch the combatants, and to hear the blasphemous oaths and curses with which the battle was accompanied.

In the midst of the affray a wizened, bent old man, who had been sitting at his door sorting rags in a basket, and apparently taking no heed of the clamour around him, made a sign to Liz.

"Take the kid now," he whispered. "Nobody 'll notice. I 'll see they don't cry arter ye."

Liz thanked him mutely by a look, and rushing to the house where the child still lay, seemingly inanimate, on the floor among the soiled clothes,

she caught it up eagerly, and hurried away to her own poor garret in a tumble-down tenement at the farthest end of the alley. The infant had been stunned by its fall, but under her tender care, and rocked in the warmth of her caressing arms, it soon recovered, though when its blue eyes opened they were full of a bewildered pain, such as may be seen in the eyes of a shot bird.

"My pet! my poor little darling!" she murmured over and over again, kissing its wee white face and soft hands; "I wish I was your mother—Lord knows I do! As it is, you're all I've got to care for. And you do love me, baby, don't you? just a little, little bit!" And as she renewed her fondling embraces, the tiny, sad-visaged creature uttered a low, crooning sound of baby satisfaction in response to her endearments—a sound more sweet to her ears than the most exquisite music, and which brought a smile to her mouth and a pathos to her dark eyes, rendering her face for the moment almost beautiful. Holding the child closely to her breast, she looked cautiously out of her narrow window, and perceived that the connubial fight was over. From the shouts of laughter and plaudits that reached her ears, Joe Mawks had evidently won the day; his wife had disappeared from the field. She saw the little crowd dispersing, most of those who composed it entering the gin-shop, and very soon the alley was comparatively quiet and deserted. By-and-by she heard her name called in a low voice: "Liz! Liz!"

She looked down and saw the old man who had promised her his protection in case Mother Mawks should persecute her. "Is that you, Jim? Come upstairs; it 's better than talking out there." He obeyed, and stood before her in the wretched room, looking curiously both at her and the baby. A wiry, wolfish-faced being was Jim Duds, as he was familiarly called, though his own name was the aristocratic and singularly inappropriate one of James Douglas. He was more like an animal than a human creature, with his straggling gray hair, bushy beard, and sharp teeth protruding like fangs from beneath his upper lip. His profession was that of an area thief, and he considered it a sufficiently respectable calling.

"Mother Mawks has got it this time," he said, with a grin which was more like a snarl. "Joe's blood was up, and he pounded her nigh into a jelly. She 'll leave ye quiet now; so long as ye pay the hire reg'lar ye 'll have Joe on yer side. If so be as there 's a bad day, ye 'd better not come home at all."

"I know," said Liz; "but she 's always had the money for the child, and surely it was n't much to ask her to let me keep it warm on such a cold night as this."

Jim Duds looked meditative. "Wot makes yer care for that babby so much?" he asked. "'T ain't yourn."

Liz sighed.

"No," she said, sadly. "That 's true. But

it seems something to hold on to, like. See what my life has been!" She stopped, and a wave of colour flushed her pallid features. "From a little girl, nothing but the streets—the long, cruel streets! and I just a bit of dirt on the pavement—no more; flung here, flung there, and at last swept into the gutter. All dark—all useless!" She laughed a little. "Fancy, Jim! I've never seen the country!"

"Nor I," said Jim, biting a piece of straw reflectively. "It must be powerful fine, with naught but green trees an' posies a-blowin' an' a-growin' everywheres. There ain't many kitching areas there, though, I'm told."

Liz went on, scarcely heeding him: "The baby seems to me like what the country must be—all harmless and sweet and quiet; when I hold it so, my heart gets peaceful somehow—I don't know why."

Again Jim looked speculative. He waved his bitten straw expressively.

"Ye've had 'sperience, Liz. Hain't ye met no man like wot ye could care fur?"

Liz trembled, and her eyes grew wild.

"Men!" she cried, with bitterest scorn—"no men have come my way, only brutes!"

Jim stared, but was silent; he had no fit answer ready. Presently Liz spoke again, more softly:

"Jim, do you know I went into a great church to-day?"

"Worse luck!" said Jim, sententiously. "Church ain't no use nohow as fur as I can see."

"There was a figure there, Jim," went on Liz, earnestly, "of a Woman holding up a Baby, and people knelt down before it. What do you s'pose it was?"

"Can't say!" replied the puzzled Jim. "Are ye sure 't was a church? Most like 't was a mooseum."

"No, no!" said Liz. "'T was a church for certain; there were folks praying in it."

"Ah, well!" growled Jim, gruffly, "much good may it do 'em! I 'm not of the prayin' sort. A woman an' a babby, did ye say? Don't ye get such cranky notions into yer head, Liz! Women an' babbies are common enough—too common, by a long chalk; an' as for prayin' to 'em—" Jim's utter contempt and incredulity were too great for further expression, and he turned away, wishing her a curt "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Liz, softly; and long after he had left her she still sat silent, thinking, thinking, with the baby asleep in her arms, listening to the rain as it dripped, dripped heavily, like clods falling on a coffin lid. She was not a good woman—far from it. Her very motive in hiring the infant at so much a day was entirely inexcusable; it was simply to gain money upon false pretences—by exciting more pity than would otherwise have been bestowed on her had she begged for herself alone, without a child in her arms. At first she had carried the baby about to serve as a mere trick of her trade, but the warm feel of its little helpless body against her bosom day after day had softened



her heart toward its innocence and pitiful weakness, and at last she had grown to love it with a strange, intense passion—so much that she would willingly have sacrificed her life for its sake. She knew that its own parents cared nothing for it, except for the money it brought them through her hands; and often wild plans would form in her poor tired brain—plans of running away with it altogether from the roaring, devouring city, to some sweet, humble country village, there to obtain work and devote herself to making this little child happy. Poor Liz! Poor, bewildered, heart-broken Liz! Ignorant London heathen as she was, there was one fragrant flower blossoming in the desert of her soiled and wasted existence—the flower of a pure and guileless love for one of those “little ones,” of whom it hath been said by an all-pitying Divinity unknown to her, “Suffer them to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

The dreary winter days crept on apace, and, as they drew near Christmas, dwellers in the streets leading off the Strand grew accustomed of nights to hear the plaintive voice of a woman, singing in a peculiarly thrilling and pathetic manner some of the old songs and ballads familiar and dear to the heart of every Englishman—“The Banks of Allan Water,” “The Bailiff’s Daughter,” “Sally in our Alley,” “The Last Rose of Summer.” All these well-loved ditties she sang one after the other, and, though her notes were neither fresh nor powerful,

they were true and often tender, more particularly in the hackneyed, but still captivating, melody of "Home, Sweet Home." Windows were opened, and pennies freely showered on the street vocalist, who was accompanied in all her wanderings by a fragile infant, which she seemed to carry with especial care and tenderness. Sometimes, too, in the bleak afternoons, she would be seen wending her way through mud and mire, setting her weary face against the bitter east wind, and patiently singing on; and motherly women, coming from the gay shops and stores, where they had been purchasing Christmas toys for their own children, would often stop to look at the baby's pinched, white features with pity, and would say, while giving their spare pennies, "Poor little thing! Is it not very ill?" And Liz, her heart freezing with sudden terror, would exclaim, hurriedly, "Oh, no, no! It is always pale; it is just a little bit weak, that's all!" And the kindly questioners, touched by the large despair of her dark eyes, would pass on and say no more. And Christmas came—the birthday of the Child Christ—a feast the sacred meaning of which was unknown to Liz; she only recognised it as a sort of large and somewhat dull bank-holiday, when all London devoted itself to church-going and the eating of roast beef and plum-pudding. The whole thing was incomprehensible to her mind, but even her sad countenance was brighter than usual on Christmas eve, and she felt almost gay, for had she not, by means of a little extra starvation on

her own part, been able to buy a wondrous gold-and-crimson worsted bird suspended from an elastic string, a bird which bobbed up and down to command in the most lively and artistic manner? And had not her hired baby actually laughed at the clumsy toy—laughed an elfish and weird laugh, the first it had ever indulged in? And Liz had laughed too, for pure gladness in the child's mirth, and the worsted bird became a sort of uncouth charm to make them both merry.

But after Christmas had come and gone, and the melancholy days, the last beating of the failing pulse of the Old Year, throbbed slowly and heavily away, the baby took upon its wan visage a strange expression—the solemn expression of worn-out and suffering age. Its blue eyes grew more solemnly speculative and dreamy, and after a while it seemed to lose all taste for the petty things of this world and the low desires of mere humanity. It lay very quiet in Liz's arms; it never cried, and was no longer fretful, and it seemed to listen with a sort of mild approval to the tones of her voice as they rang out in the dreary streets, through which, by day and night, she patiently wandered. By-and-by the worsted bird, too, fell out of favour; it jumped and glittered in vain; the baby surveyed it with an unmoved air of superior wisdom, just as if it had suddenly found out what real birds were like, and was not to be deceived into accepting so poor an imitation of nature. Liz grew uneasy, but she had no one in whom to confide her fears. She

had been very regular in her payments to Mother Mawks, and that irate lady, kept in order by her bull-dog of a husband, had been of late very contented to let her have the child without further interference. Liz knew well enough that no one in the miserable alley where she dwelt would care whether the baby were ill or not. They would tell her, "The more sickly the better for your trade." Besides, she was jealous; she could not endure the idea of any one tending it or touching it but herself. Children were often ailing, she thought, and if left to themselves without doctor's stuff they recovered sometimes more quickly than they had sickened. Thussoothing her inward tremors as best she might, she took more care than ever of her frail charge, stinting herself that she might nourish it, though the baby seemed to care less and less for mundane necessities, and only submitted to be fed, as it were, under patient and silent protest.

And so the sands in Time's hour-glass ran slowly but surely away, and it was New-Year's eve. Liz had wandered about all day, singing her little repertoire of ballads in the teeth of a cruel, snow-laden wind—so cruel that people otherwise charitably disposed had shut close their doors and windows, and had not even heard her voice. Thus the last span of the Old Year had proved most unprofitable and dreary; she had gained no more than sixpence; how could she return with only that humble amount to face Mother Mawks and her vituperative fury? Her throat ached; she was

very tired, and, as the night darkened from pale to deep and starless shadows, she strolled mechanically from the Strand to the Embankment, and after walking some little distance she sat down in a corner close to Cleopatra's Needle—that mocking obelisk that has looked upon the decay of empires, itself impassive, and that still appears to say, “Pass on, ye puny generations! I, a mere carven block of stone, shall outlive you all!” For the first time in all her experience the child in her arms seemed a heavy burden. She put aside her shawl and surveyed it tenderly; it was fast asleep, a small, peaceful smile on its thin, quiet face. Thoroughly worn out herself, she leaned her head against the damp stone wall behind her, and clasping the infant tightly to her breast, she also slept—the heavy, dreamless sleep of utter fatigue and physical exhaustion. The solemn night moved on, a night of black vapours; the pageant of the Old Year's death-bed was unbrightened by so much as a single star. None of the hurrying passers-by perceived the weary woman where she slept in that obscure corner, and for a long while she rested there undisturbed. Suddenly a vivid glare of light dazzled her eyes; she started to her feet half asleep, but still instinctively retaining the infant in her close embrace. A dark form, buttoned to the throat and holding a brilliant bull's-eye lantern, stood before her.

“Come now,” said this personage, “this won't do! Move on!”

Liz smiled faintly and apologetically.

"All right!" she answered, striving to speak cheerfully, and raising her eyes to the policeman's good-natured countenance. "I did n't mean to fall asleep here. I don't know how I came to do it. I must go home, of course."

"Of course," said the policeman, somewhat mollified by her evident humility, and touched in spite of himself by the pathos of her eyes. Then turning his lamp more fully upon her, he continued, "Is that a baby you 've got there?"

"Yes," said Liz, half proudly, half tenderly. "Poor little dear! it's been ailing sadly—but I think it's better now than it was."

And, encouraged by his friendly tone, she opened the folds of her shawl to show him her one treasure. The bull's-eye came into still closer requisition as the kindly guardian of the peace peered inquiringly at the tiny bundle. He had scarcely looked when he started back with an exclamation:

"God bless my soul!" he cried, "it's dead!"

"Dead!" shrieked Liz; "oh, no, no! Not dead! Don't say so, oh, don't, don't say so! Oh, you can't mean it! Oh, for God's love, say you did n't mean it! It can't be dead, not really dead—no, no, indeed! Oh, baby, baby! You are not dead, my pet, my angel, not dead, oh no!"

And breathless, frantic with fear, she felt the little thing's hands and feet and face, kissed it wildly, and called it by a thousand endearing names, in vain—in vain! Its tiny body was al-

ready stiff and rigid; it had been a corpse more than two hours.

The policeman coughed, and brushed his thick gauntlet glove across his eyes. He was an emissary of the law, but he had a heart. He thought of his bright-eyed wife at home, and of the soft-cheeked, cuddling little creature that clung to her bosom and crowed with rapture whenever he came near.

"Look here," he said, very gently, laying one hand on the woman's shoulder as she crouched shivering against the wall, and staring piteously at the motionless waxen form in her arms; "it's no use fretting about it." He paused; there was an uncomfortable lump in his throat, and he had to cough again to get it down. "The poor little creature's gone—there's no help for it. The next world's a better place than this, you know! There, there, don't take on so about it"—this as Liz shuddered and sighed; a sigh of such complete despair that it went straight to his honest soul, and showed him how futile were his efforts at consolation. But he had his duty to attend to, and he went on in firmer tones: "Now, like a good woman, you just move off from here and go home. If I leave you here by yourself a bit, will you promise me to go straight home? I must n't find you here when I come back on this beat, d' ye understand?" Liz nodded. "That's right!" he resumed, cheerily. "I'll give you just ten minutes; you just go straight home."

And with a "Good-night," uttered in accents meant to be comforting, he turned away and paced on, his measured tread echoing on the silence at first loudly, then fainter and fainter, till it altogether died away, as his bulky figure disappeared in the distance. Left to herself, Liz rose from her crouching posture; rocking the dead child in her arms, she smiled.

"Go straight home!" she murmured, half aloud. "Home, sweet home! Yes, baby; yes, my darling, we will go home together!"

And creeping cautiously along in the shadows, she reached a flight of the broad stone steps leading down to the river. She descended them, one by one; the black water lapped against them heavily, heavily; the tide was full up. She paused; a sonorous, deep-toned iron voice rang through the air with reverberating, solemn melody. It was the great bell of St. Paul's tolling midnight—the Old Year was dead.

"Straight home!" she repeated, with a beautiful, expectant look in her wild, weary eyes. "My little darling! Yes, we are both tired; we will go home! Home, sweet home! We will go!"

Kissing the cold face of the baby corpse she held, she threw herself forward; there followed a sullen, deep splash—a slight struggle—and all was over! The water lapped against the steps heavily, heavily, as before; the policeman passed once more, and saw to his satisfaction that the coast was clear; through the dark veil of the sky one star looked



out and twinkled for a brief instant, then disappeared again. A clash and clamour of bells startled the brooding night; here and there a window was opened, and figures appeared in balconies to listen. They were ringing in the New Year—the festival of hope, the birthday of the world! But what were New Years to her, who, with white, upturned face, and arms that embraced an infant in the tenacious grip of death, went drifting, drifting solemnly down the dark river, unseen, unpitied by all those who awoke to new hopes and aspirations on that first morning of another life-probation! Liz had gone; gone to make her peace with God—perhaps through the aid of her “hired” baby, the little sinless soul she had so fondly cherished; gone to that sweetest “home” we dream of and pray for, where the lost and bewildered wanderers of this earth shall find true welcome and rest from grief and exile; gone to that fair, far glory-world where reigns the divine Master, whose words still ring above the tumult of ages: “See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that their angels do always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.”









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